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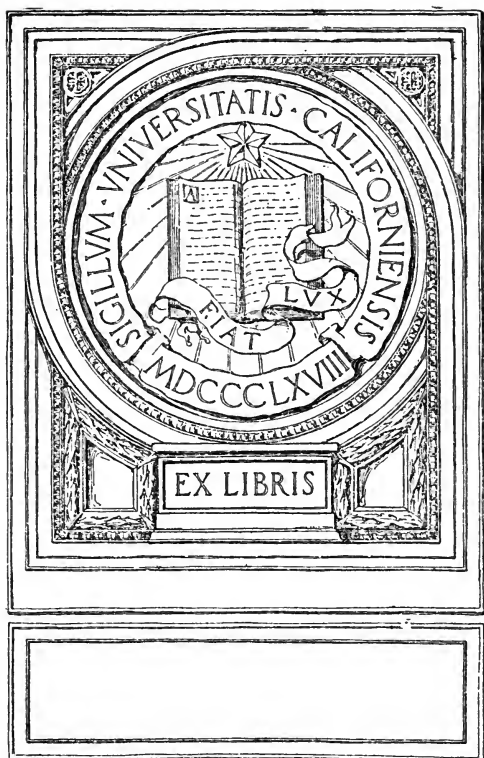
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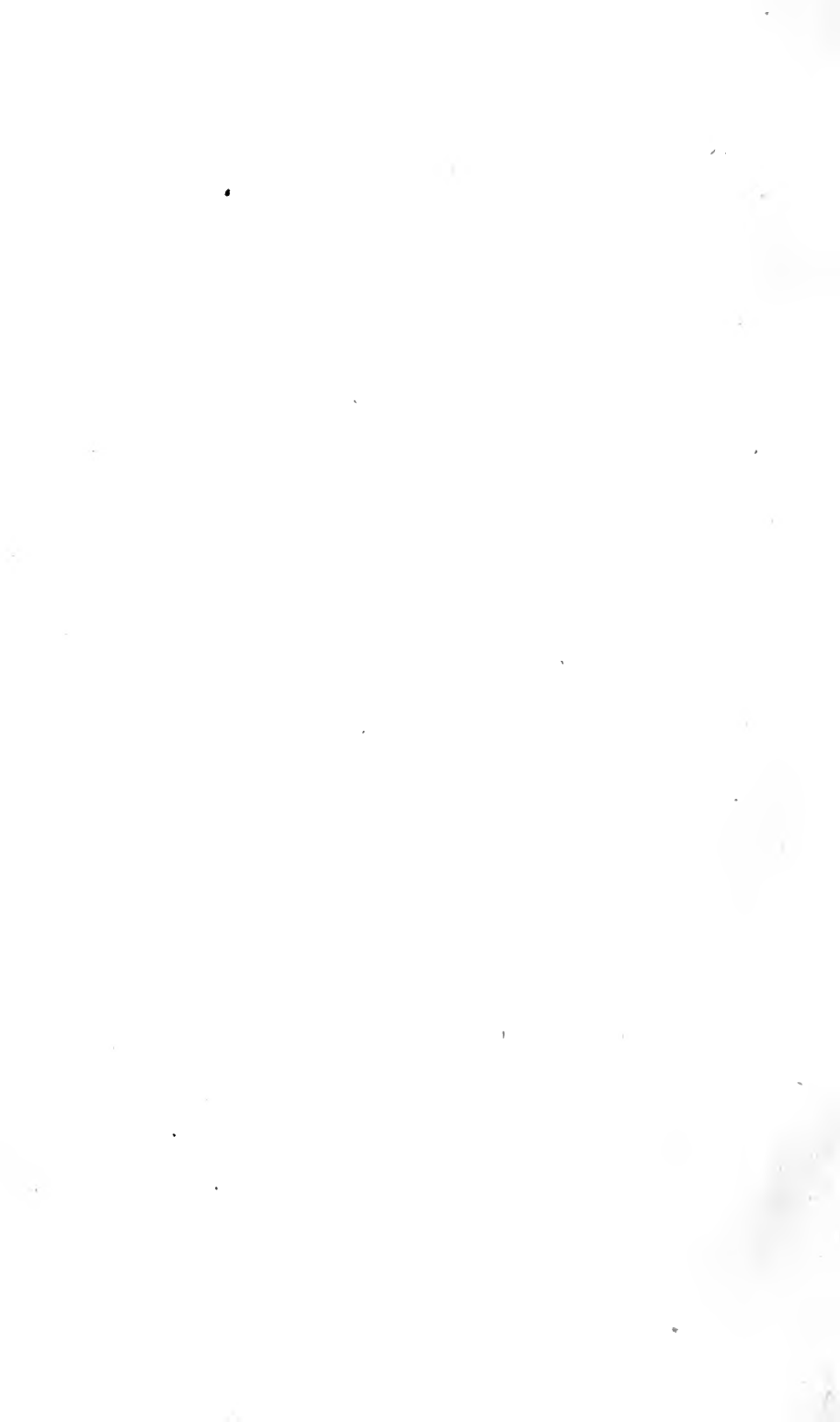
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SOME NAVAL DOINGS

BY

E. HILTON YOUNG, M.P.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER, R.N.V.R.

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BY SEA AND LAND.

PROLOGUE.

IT was on my last night at sea that a shipmate said to me, "You have had a variety of experiences with the navy in the war; you should write a book, in order that we may have the amusement of reading in it what you think about all that you have heard and seen."

The words were spoken in jest, but considering them in earnest, I wondered whether it might not be possible for me to write down something for the entertainment of those with whom for more than four years my life had been spent. I should be glad to help them to pass a dull and vacant hour, I thought, for I know how many are their vacant hours, and how dull they are. I had another thought also: it was that I had had an experience that was not common. It cannot often have happened to anybody to find himself transformed in a day from a peaceable citizen into the semblance at least of a naval officer following his occupation on active service at sea. Might there not be something in the very virginity and innocence of my impressions that would interest people who wanted to know what the war was like to the sailors? I thought that perhaps there might be; so I took my shipmate's jest for earnest and wrote down my memories of a four years' dream—

how a peaceable landsman fell asleep and dreamed that he was a naval officer, how in course of time he began to think that the dream was true, and how he woke up and found himself a landsman after all.

Towards the end of June 1914 I was travelling in an Austrian coasting steamer from Santi Quaranta to Trieste. My summer holiday was over, and I was contemplating askance the prospect of another eleven months of work in the dreary City. In a flood of that sun which we had come to find, Edward and I, we sat on deck and watched the golden sides of the mountain range of Chimarra breaking down into the sparkling blue of the Adriatic. We had just been riding there, and we could make out as a white speck on the brown hillside the village above the gorge where, sitting at table with the chieftain and feasting on the largest and sweetest figs in the world, we had discussed with him the affairs of all Europe, and especially of Chimarra. A strange figure of a man was crouched upon the deck by our side. He wore blue shorts, a zephyr, a brown Tyrolese hat, and a pair of tinted spectacles, and his skin was so blackened by exposure to the sun that it was difficult to tell his age or race : he might have been a Hindu fakir. Presently this oddity came and spoke to us, using the German language. With much simplicity he poured out a story of misfortune, prefacing it with a general account of his history and condition. He was a medical student, now of Vienna, but his native place was a village in Carinthia, on the very border-line between the German and the Slovene districts of that province. The name of Slovene acted on him like a spark in the magazine :

whenever it came into his discourse he went off with a bang. *Lieber Herr!* the Slovenes were animals! It was hardly to be believed that enlightened nations—the English, for example—should sympathize with such animals. The explosions alarmed us, and all the more because we had said nothing to provoke his invective; but we made a polite murmur, and he forgot the distant Slovenes in the memory of more immediate misfortunes. In his vacation he had been to Corfu, far from the Slovenes, to exercise that cult of the sun-bath which was then so widely spread amongst Teutonic students. One day he had been at his ritual, lying on the edge of the sea on the sands where Ulysses came to land, and in the same costume, when a dishonest Corfiote, who was at work in the fields near by, stole all his money from his clothes. When he came back to dress, there the rascal still was, working in the fields, and he ran up to him and said, “Come with me to the police.” And the man went with him to the police and said, “I have not stolen his money.” And the police were dishonest Corfiotes too, and said “Ba! ba!” to him, although he spoke to them in very good Greek. So now he had no money with which to pay his way home from Trieste. He asked us shyly whether we, members of an enlightened nation, would lend him enough money to enable him to get home to the village so near the Slovenes? Edward and I lent him fifty francs; and his letter from Carinthia repaying us was amongst the last that travelled across the Continent before the posts were stopped by war.

The green twilight was fading behind the mountains of Albania when we dropped our anchor in the Bay of

Valona. A boat was waiting for us in the roads, full of fugitives from the town. Valona was at that time a boiling pot of Catholic and Mussulman Albanians, Orthodox Epirotes, and Italian and Austrian agents. In name it was part of the territory of that shadow of a man, Mpret Wilhelm of Albania, once of Wied and soon to be of Wied again, but to represent his authority in the town there were only a few gendarmes under Dutch officers. A faction fight might break out at any time, and timid folk were glad to get away. Amongst the fugitives was a Hungarian journalist from Pesth. His white yachting cap was dirty, his drab alpaca jacket was dirty, and his feeble face was dirty with a dirt made plainer by the pallor of fear. He had just been expelled from Valona by the Dutch officers, and he was raging with spite against them. The *schweine-reien* they were doing there !

“ What *schweinerereien* ? ” asked our student eagerly, his eyes round with curiosity. He was of the race and class for whom the Hungarian knew well how to cater.

“ Prisoners with their eyes gouged out, children hung up by the thumbs, villages given to fire and sword, arson, murder, and rape ! ” and so on through all the familiar bill of fare of Balkan atrocities—all committed under his very eyes by the Dutch officers. We were turning away to avoid telling him that he was surely a liar, when he paused in his relation to ask, had we heard the news ?

“ No ; what news ? ”

“ The Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were shot dead yesterday at Serajevo by the Serbians.”

“ *Nun Gott sei dank !* ” cried the student, and fell

on his knees on the deck, with his arms outstretched to heaven.

Less interested in the news than disgusted at its bloodthirsty reception, we turned upon our heels. In a moment the ingenuous youth came pattering after us: he should not have said that, no! but we could not understand his feelings. The Slovenes were such animals, and the Archduke had been their friend. He would even have given them an equal voice in the Empire with Teutons. While he lived the Empire was not safe. But how could we understand, who were members of a fortunate nation that had not got to live next door to the Slovenes?

“And what will happen in Carinthia now?” we asked. Now the Slovenes would be taught their place; the Austrian Empire would be safe again, and all would be well. We left him to master by himself his hysterical joy at the coming downfall of the Slovenes; and with no sense that Fate had spoken a word for us as well as for him we paced the deck for an hour or two of the warm night, speaking of what seemed to us more important things—of the old statues that we had seen at Athens, and of the new pictures that we were going to see at Paris; of a reform in Edward’s office that might come some day, and of a book that he thought might be written. The lights of Durazzo flashed as we passed, but there came to me no foresight of a scene of misery, the dying remnants of an army and a nation lying there with defeat and exile for their sole possession; nor to Edward any foresight of a slope above the Somme, of the mud, the broken wires, and the line of men that followed him from the trench in the last and most glorious moment of a noble life.

CHAPTER I.

SCAPA FLOW—H.M.S. IRON DUKE.

IN the first days of July I sat down again at my desk in Broad Street, and yawned to think of the coming months of dull monotony. Although the dullness of the City in summer was soon broken by the first signs of the gathering storm, yet until the very eve of the fateful fourth of August few of us, I think, really understood that our participation in the war was inevitable. We were unable to grasp the fact that the wolf, which had been so often falsely cried, was at last in truth upon us. D. and I walked down to Parliament Square on the evening of the third in order to wait for early news of what Sir Edward Grey had said. In the Strand we became involved in a straggling procession that was going our way, cheering a little and waving banners. Both of us were then against England entering the war, and we said despondently, "It is all up! This is the beginning of the war fever." But in fact it was a procession of London Irishmen demonstrating about Home Rule. I forget whether they were for it or against it; but whether they were Home Rulers or Ulstermen, they had not a thought that night beyond their local grievance. Soon they had other things to think about, and set themselves, for the most part, strenuously to think about them.

In Parliament Square we heard of the speech and that we were going to war. "The crime of crimes has been committed," we said, "in defiance of common sense and humanity. The artificial schemes of bureaucrats have been allowed to plunge us needlessly into the greatest of all disasters. Human beings must suffer and die because diplomats have quarrelled over their game."

Does it seem strange that we should have spoken thus that night, or that all our small efforts during July should have been devoted to trying to persuade people that we need not go to war? It does seem strange to me now, but I know no reason why we should wear a penitential sheet for what then we did and said. Much that now makes our error seem egregious is wisdom after the event. Knowing no more than what we did, our error was natural and for us inevitable. We did not know that Germany, mad with the ambition to dominate mankind, was ready to fall tooth and claw upon humanity, careless if she put herself outside the pale of civilization in the attainment of her desire. We neither knew it, nor had we good reason to suppose it. What happened in Belgium soon opened our eyes, but on the fourth of August our ignorance was not culpable. People have almost forgotten now the strength with which, during fifty years of peace, they had come to believe that, whatever else might be right, war must be wrong. It was a prejudice against war, be it admitted, that made many Englishmen struggle to the last moment to keep England at peace—that made them so slow to see how unbreakable were the cords that were pulling us into war. But need one regret the prejudice

or apologize for it? As a prejudice it was far better and healthier than its converse—the prejudice that war is a desirable and ennobling business. It was a far better filling for those interstices of the mind into which reason and knowledge cannot penetrate than the jingo hysteria that sets its victims clamouring for slaughter as soon as the sensational press waves a bloodthirsty headline.

War came swiftly, and for a time what was happening in the city was food enough for thought. It was not until towards the end of August that the house of money was shored up, provisionally but safely, and that there was time for anything else but the effort to follow and to foresee the crowding incidents in the greatest of all financial crises. When there was time to look about one again, and to think about one's own relation to the war, one had to realize that mere pacificism had died a natural death. Already the invasion of Belgium, and the manner of it, made one doubt whether in truth England had decided wrongly; and although it was not until after fuller knowledge had come of the state of Germany's mind that those doubts grew into a certainty, already they were strong enough to deprive one of the clear conviction needed in order to enable one to reject the obligations imposed by citizenship. Our army had crossed the Channel; Liège and Namur had fallen, and things were not going well. England had descended into the arena; and whether it was right or wrong of her to go in, it was the business of every Englishman to see that she got safely out again. Peace might have been better than war, but the choice was not now between war and peace—it was between defeat and victory; and victory was certainly better than

defeat. A month had in fact made the issue clear enough for men of military age ; but it was only a vague idea that soon something might have to be done that was simmering in my head when, on the evening of August 27th, I went to dine with Vincent. In our unmilitary world we thought that soldiers and sailors were soldiers and sailors ; that we, on the other hand, were civilians, and that to put ourselves forward as combatants would be to make ourselves ridiculous. So many people were running about and offering to do all sorts of things for which they were unsuited that it was better to stay quiet and not to add to an already regrettable confusion. If one was wanted one would be told. So far had I got in meditation over V.'s port when he was called away to the telephone, and I overheard him telling Kenneth that they would be very glad if he would go, and could he go at once ?

" Where is Kenneth going ? " I asked.

There was a great pressure of work, said V., deciphering telegrams on board the *Cyclops*, which was the depot ship at the base of the Grand Fleet in Scapa Flow, and they had telegraphed for more decipherers. Kenneth was going up there for a few weeks in order to help until the pressure was over. Fate is not above taking the meanest advantage of us. Coming behind us unawares at a cross-road that we barely notice, it gives us the gentlest push, and, before we know that anything has happened, we are walking in an entirely unexpected and unintended direction. Next morning I found myself getting into the Scottish express with Kenneth : we were on our way to decipher for the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow. In our pockets we had

each of us the most surprising of possessions—a commission as lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. We must have that, they said, because without it the Germans would shoot us if we were taken prisoners. But we had no uniforms: V. had to send them after us.

When we arrived at Thurso, close to the secret haunts of the fleet of fleets, at once we began to feel the influence of war-fever. Nerves stretch in spite of themselves on their approach to a seat of war, and one is surprised to find one's judgment and common sense playing for a time the most ridiculous pranks. Self-preservation is the most powerful of instincts. In ordinary life it passes its time in sleep; but when one who is unused to it begins to think about enemies and fighting and danger to life, his nerves send to the instinct a warning call, and it wakes up and begins to insist upon consideration. A worthy magistrate of Caithness shared our supper with us that night at the inn, and although he had no closer contact with the war than in the reading of police reports about spies, his nerves were stretched like harpstrings. The county of Caithness, it seemed, teemed with spies; there was in particular a lady of great beauty who had passed most of the police stations in the county in a motor car and a purple veil. If she came to Thurso that would be the end of her infamous career. He thundered against spies and the all-pervading crypto-Germans, and when he went to bed it was not to sleep. Even in the apparent safety of a back bedroom at the inn at Thurso war brought him an adventure. An hour or two later the landlord told us of it over our final tumbler. The magistrate was undressing by his un-

shuttered window when he heard a sharp crack on the glass, and, looking down, saw that a window pane had been holed and starred. The war! A spy had shot at him! He threw himself on to the floor and crawled out of the room. The landlord, the cowman, and the gardener were summoned and sent to lurk in ambush in the yard, while the magistrate, with a pluck that was creditable if his frame of mind be considered, went back and showed himself at the window. Nothing happened. Perhaps the spy had seen him fall and had been wafted away on the wings of guilt and remorse. A formal inquiry into the circumstances was being held when the magistrate noticed that a button was newly missing from his trousers. Search revealed it lying on the window-sill. The housemaid gave evidence that the star in the glass was an old one. Some active mind suggested that braces when being pulled off the shoulder are capable of tearing off a loose button and propelling it to a distance with some violence—and the mystery was over.

Early next morning we stood on the forlorn jetty at Scrabster and waited for the destroyer that was to take us out to the Flow. Waves and sky were gray, and the seaweed washed in a melancholy way about the stones of the deserted breakwater. The destroyer, of a gray darker than the waves, slipped round the point and came to rest outside. Soon we were out in the Pentland Firth. The destroyer was uncanny: it was so incredibly slim. How could a ship be so like a needle and not break in two? The lieutenant and sub-lieutenant who gave us to eat and to drink in the doll's chamber aft were people in a dream. They talked and

laughed, and all the time they were responsible for moving this dangerous, elaborate contrivance about the sea, exercising incredible qualities of decision and self-reliance, and commanding unexplored worlds of technical acquirement and special experience. Kenneth and I looked at each other—we who were naval officers too of a certain age, but of one day's seniority, and who were at sea in a warship for the first time—and our look had in it something of dejection. This was only an interlude, of course; it was no more than a holiday; and what could be better than to combine our duty to our country with an exciting adventure? But somehow this destroyer, with the stark little guns perched in such exposed positions on round pulpits, was so grim: there seemed something about it that lacked those comforting unrealities of romantic drama which had been the atmosphere surrounding our adventure until then. It was uncomfortably real; and out there, Duncansby and Dunnet Heads, those solemn and majestic headlands fronting the northern seas, bastions of strength untroubled by the deep flood that washed perpetually westward round their base, in their dark and lonely watch there was something ominous and solemn that went ill with a frame of mind of pleasant and detached excitement about the war. Gray and barren islands, lurking rocks foamed over by a bottomless torrent that slid in vast eddies from sea to sea, and lightless, shadowy headlands—these were the Navy's Britain; and this slim, grotesque machine, all gray steel and grimy men, that plunged and snouted up the waves and shook with compressed energy—this was the Navy. Here, then, was a reality or two, our first realities at sea, for us to compare

with our anticipatory imaginations, and to substitute for them if they did not match. In the presence of realities so great and so new, comfortable pretences about combining a little useful work with a pleasant outing did not thrive. The look of Duncansby Head wilted them. It was from that time that both of us, I think, began to feel that without knowing it we had ceased to be our own masters. England was catching us in her snare of the sea, and there would be no escape. It was all very well to tell ourselves that this was only an interlude ; but were there not formidable obligations, strengthened by old instincts and traditions, in wait for Englishmen who ventured to play at serving England at sea and in war-time ? Already half-conscious that this business might turn out to be no joke, we arrived on our destroyer in the Flow at the world's end, and we were sent on board the *Cyclops*. The fleet was out, and we saw no ships but her.

It was dark when we went on board the *Cyclops*. Every cabin and every foot of space in the long passages between decks were crowded with hammocks and make-shift sleeping bunks that had been rigged up for officers and midshipmen who had arrived since the fleet went out and were awaiting the return of their ships. Cipher telegrams were pouring in faster than the staff could deal with them, although they worked twenty-four hours a day ; so we went straight to the cabin which had been fitted up as a ciphering office and launched ourselves upon the mysteries of codes and decodes. Faster than we could deal with them the orderlies kept piling the telegrams at our elbow ; and as no one on the *Cyclops* had had much sleep of late, we were allowed to

sit up for the work during the night. When everybody had turned in, the canvas screen across our door shook and a flaxen head was thrust in mysteriously, almost on a level with the deck above. It belonged to a midshipman the rest of whom was in a hammock in the gangway outside, and before he drew in his head, tortoise-like, and disappeared in the remarkable way in which a human being can disappear into a hammock, we learned that he had a grievance. He had left Dartmouth on mobilization a month before, and he would be glad if some one would tell him when he was going to get into a proper ship. Here he had been stuck for a month in the *Cyclops*, for the battle of Heligoland and all, and the *Cyclops* was not a proper ship. Was he to spend the war sitting in harbour and looking at the fleet going in and out? It was too much to expect of him. Ignorant of the future, we could give him only a barren sympathy. But within the month he was to have his chance of serving England well at a high moment. Within the week our midshipman went to H.M.S. *Aboukir*, and was one of the few of his age who survived the loss of the three cruisers. I was to meet him again afterwards—going to sea in a ship as proper as any lad could desire, a destroyer of the Harwich force.

The night wore on ; the ship grew cold and silent ; the ciphered messages came and went ; and our minds grew as numb as our fingers with the slow reckoning of the figures. Presently through the porthole before us a cold dawn revealed a sad hillside of moss-hags and draggled heather, a fringe of slimy rock, and waters motionless and dull, all dim and blotted in shadows

and gray mist. Romantic enthusiasm and other light impulses must be very strong to flourish in an Orkney dawn : they failed then, and doubt and wonder came to me as to what we were about. An inward voice suddenly called loudly that war was not only a great public evil, but that it was a great personal disgrace also to everybody who took part in it. There was no reason in war ; passion and error were the cause of it, and was it not disgraceful to conform to them ? It were surely better to separate oneself and to protest against the great mistake of war by refusing to have anything to do with it. If everybody did that there could be no wars ; so that was the most effective protest that could be made, and the only one that could much help future generations.

“ Do not talk to me about a war of simple self-defence ! ” I said to myself. “ There is a stronger duty than to defend national institutions, however good in themselves and however cherished. That is a duty to one’s own community only, which is one of many ; and to resist the passions and errors that are the cause of war is a duty to all mankind. You are a citizen of the world first and of England second. It is all very well to help England by resisting the Germans (Are you really here to do that, or are you only here for an outing ?), but what about helping the world ? The best help that you can give to the world is by resisting war.”

“ But this is the war to end war,” I argued with myself.

“ Humbug ! ” I answered myself. “ I know perfectly well that the fury, horror, hate, and vainglory

that this war is engendering are no heralds of the millennium."

So I sat for some time in doubt over the ciphers ; until, with an access of conviction, I addressed myself again :—

" It may be true that the obligation to resist war is a stronger obligation than that to resist the enemies of my country ; but if I and everybody else were to put that theory into practice by refusing to fight, what would happen ? The Germans would overrun the civilized world and reorganize it on their military plan ; and the result of that would be that, however right the pacifist theory may be, there would soon be nobody left to hold it—the Prussian drill sergeants would have bullied all the pacifists to death. There must be something wrong in a theory that if it were consistently applied would lead to its own extermination. Besides, if the Germans are allowed to make a success of military aggression there will be no chance for peace in the future, nor will there be any chance for decency, justice, and right, if the outrages and wrongs that they are committing are allowed to go unpunished. Before general and perpetual peace can come men must be fixedly persuaded of two things—that military aggression does not pay, and that for a state, as for an individual, there is retribution for outrage and wrong. When we have demonstrated the truth of that we shall have a solid foundation on which to build the house of peace ; but to start work upon it now would be to build upon the sands."

Not a little encouraged by the result of this inward argument I "turned over" my watch to the sleepy

paymaster who came to relieve me and faced for the first time the difficulties of climbing into a hammock ; and as I sought sleep in the now bright daylight I reflected that, although the pacifist within me had been routed in the argument, deciphering telegrams in the *Cyclops*, a depot ship, was not, after all, an unduly bloodthirsty occupation.

The next morning the fleet came in, and as Kenneth and I were off duty we stood on deck to watch the gray monsters detach themselves one by one from the mass of the island of Flotta as they came out of Hoxa Sound and glided slowly across the Flow to stop in regular and unending lines at their appointed anchorages. A kindly and long-suffering sub-lieutenant, who was waiting for his ship, the *Lion*, managed to fathom our ignorance and told us which was which. There was a pause at the end of the procession, and then one more bulk loomed behind the island. "Here comes the flagship," said the sub-lieutenant, and with a thrill we saw the *Iron Duke* move slowly down the lines and come to rest in the inmost berth.

Might not the coldest and least emotional of men have allowed himself a thrill at the sight ? What is thrilling if it be not a sight or sound that adequately symbolizes some great force or fact—a crowded meeting, a bird's song at dawn, a gun, or a baby ? The *Iron Duke* was the symbol for so much, and it was such a wonderful symbol for it. Embodied in that steel behemoth were the mind and will of sea-power ; and now that England was at war there, too, were the mind and will of her, the mistress of the seas, and through her of the spirit of liberty and order ranged in arms

against the spirit of lawlessness and domination. That seemed to be the central and radiant point of the light of glamour that surrounded the *Iron Duke*. She was the casket of all our good hopes for the future and of those of all the world ; and there were memories that increased and variegated the romantic splendour of the ship, memories of all ships from the *Great Harry* to the *Victory*, which had kept England inviolate ; of all great admirals from Blake to Nelson, whose history was England's, and the flag of whose successor flew there—the one tiny speck of white in the gray outline. Now that England was at war again an Englishman must feel a new-born reverence for that flag in memory of the long generations of seamen who had fought and died there—under, on seas as waste and unkindly as these, in faith and duty to a community that, however confusedly and dimly, had on the whole always wished the world well, and had never of set malice abused its power for the oppression of mankind. A dying poet had lately found words for our emotion that rang now in our ears :—

“O bright with blood of heroes ! Not a star
Of all the north shines purer on the sea !”

The flagship and her flag were symbols of the law-abiding and benevolent power of England. Our reverence for them might surely be absolute and unqualified by any doubts or fears about abuse of power, or by any thoughts about the evils of militarism and war. Whatever else might be doubtful, there need be no doubt about the sailor's duty. They held their country in their hands, and its very existence depended on them. No

one who did not desire that Germany should make herself master of a subjugated world could do anything but desire passionately that victory should still attend our fleet.

That night, our second night afloat, we had our first battle, which was the First Battle of Scapa Flow. The defences of the Flow were unfinished, and it was not yet impossible for a hostile submarine to find her way in. To do so she must risk the currents of the Pentland Firth, elude the patrolling destroyers and drifters and the shore batteries, and face the enormous difficulties of navigation in passing through one or other of the narrow sounds, which are sown with jagged skerries and hidden rocks. It was almost impossible, but it was not quite ; and the authorities were anxious accordingly. Everybody was arguing whether or not a submarine could get over from the Jade and make her way in amongst the battle squadrons ; so the times were ripe for a scare, and it came. After dark we were brought on deck by a noise of gunfire in Hoxa Sound. Suddenly there was a hiss, and the night was barred by the beams of countless searchlights radiating from the hidden ships. They wheeled in circles over the surface of the sea, searching hither and thither. One fancied them the beams of giant eyes staring with dreadful intentness for a sight of the hidden danger and ready to flash a sensor message along the ship's optic nerve to her brain—a message which would return thence as a motor impulse to release the terrific energy of the guns. The *Iron Duke* began to wink rapidly ; picket-boats were to be sent away to patrol in search of a periscope. The

Cyclops had a picket-boat, and soon the little craft dashed off with a lieutenant in charge and our midshipman of the night before in the bows. There was another burst of gunfire from the Sound ; but soon after the searchlights hissed and vanished, and we heard that the battle was over. When our picket-boat came back an hour or two later we learnt something about what had been happening. In such affairs at sea, and especially in night affairs, it is not easy to understand what anybody else is about. Except for one's own doings the course of events is usually wrapped in mystery. Legends and rumours soon spring up ; and I do not know for certain what did happen that night. But the story was that one of the patrolling destroyers thought that she saw a periscope in the dark and made for it, firing her guns. Another destroyer heard the noise and, dashing up, saw a white wake in the water and opened fire on that. On closer inspection the white wake turned out to be that of the preceding destroyer, so the second destroyer spun round, saw another wake, and shot at that, only to perceive that this other wake was her own. Meanwhile a ricochetting shot from one of the destroyers had landed ashore and burst alongside one of the batteries there. The battery promptly signalled that she was being shelled by hostile craft, and opened fire at large. Soon the whole fleet was stirred to a state of agitation, and it was some little time before the flagship could sort things out and call everybody to order. The *Cyclops*' picket-boat was patrolling near to where the destroyer had first seen the supposed periscope when the hawk's eye of our midshipman perceived something sticking up from the waves. It was

the pole of a flag-buoy turned upside down ; and everybody, including the Commander-in-Chief and omitting only the destroyer that began it all, was disposed to think that the supposed periscope and the flag-buoy were one.

For some weeks we sat and deciphered in our cabin office in the *Cyclops*, and watched through the scuttle the battle squadrons make their solemn, slow procession in and out, and the destroyer flotillas wheel and slip off through the sound in their eager, purposeful way. Every time that the fleet went to sea it became more depressing to be left behind. To-morrow, one thought, may be the great day : it would be awful to be there, but on the whole it would be more awful not to be there now that one had come so close. Could one perhaps get taken to sea in a real ship in some capacity or other, if only for a single trip ? I asked our immediate chief, the rear-admiral's secretary, and he proved himself a worker of miracles. In a day or two, to my surprise and a little to my consternation, the thing was done—to my consternation because, after half a lifetime of peace and security, in asking to be taken to sea in a warship in quest of Armageddon I could not but feel like one who has made up his mind to face the dentist and yet cherishes a secret hope, as he voluntarily rings the bell, that the dentist will be out. But when our secretary told me that he thought it was possible that a use might be found for a R.N.V.R. officer, and actually in the *Iron Duke* herself, the magnificence of the chance dwarfed all other thoughts. In the early days of the war there was a certain fluidity in arrangements of the sort ; and one fine evening I found myself standing

with my box on the *Iron Duke's* quarter-deck, a humble member of that great body. What my duties were to be neither I nor, I think, anybody else had any very clear idea; but for the time it was enough for my ambition only to be there. The situation was more like a dream than ever. There is a dream, dreamt by many, in which the dreamer finds himself an acknowledged authority on some subject or master of some accomplishment, and yet knows that he is nothing of the sort, and struggles to reconcile his reputation with his consciousness of his own ignorance. I sometimes dream, for instance, that I am a famous *virtuoso* waiting fiddle in hand in the ante-room of a concert hall, and that in a minute or two I am to go out, and to play to an expectant crowd. I am immensely pleased to find that I have won so great a reputation, and yet I know all the time that I cannot play a note. How are the two things to be reconciled? In the dream I think to myself that these doubts are ridiculous, that I must be a great player or I should not be there. Surely I have only to mount the platform and to begin, and I shall find that I can do it; and yet, how on earth is it done? My feelings were of the same nature when I found myself standing that evening on the deck of the fleet flagship, in a situation and clothes that showed that I was accounted a naval officer, and yet knowing all the time that I had not the least idea how to begin. The only way out of it, I said to myself, is to do what I have sometimes done in the dream—to tell the audience all about it. They will understand that such things do happen in dreams (and really and truly this must be a dream after all), and they will be good-natured about

it ; they always have been in former dreams. I did indeed thereafter try that plan at sea whenever it was necessary, and I found that the audience were as good-natured as ever.

There followed a week during which the fleet stopped quietly in harbour, and my head had room for one thought only—not to get in anybody's way. The material universe in which I lived was divided into innumerable small compartments ; each compartment was filled with useful objects ; and the uses of each and all of them were a profound mystery to me. My ship-mates were one and all regularly and intently busy, and the business of each was a mystery as great. A corner of the settee in the wardroom seemed the only safe harbour of refuge. There I could be sure that I was not interfering with the use of any of the objects, or impeding the business of any of the company. There, too, there seemed to be no forms and ceremonies. Elsewhere, and especially on the quarter-deck where officers of great magnificence abounded, I could never be sure that I was not doing something dreadful. Sometimes one saluted and sometimes one did not ; sometimes one seemed to be able to walk about at ease, at other times everybody was as rigid and attentive as on a parade ground. In the wardroom alone there was safety ; and sitting there in a corner I could learn a little about who was who and what was what, and how they were all occupying themselves. I was driven out from my refuge by the first beginnings of a job of work. The flag-captain sent for me and said that he had arranged that I was to be saved from the writing business, and that I was to have an opportunity of learning to be

useful as an executive officer. The measure of my ignorance is that at the moment I could only be grateful because it was clear that he had taken trouble on my behalf. Not having yet realized the gulf that is fixed between the writing branch of the service and the executive branch, I actually traversed it unconscious of my good fortune in doing so, and with a longing and a lingering look behind at the desk and the pen. I was wondering whether, since I had dealt with pen and paper all my years, I should not be more useful in the war were I to continue to deal with them ; but it was soon clear that the prospect which the liberal and optimistic mind of the flag-captain held out was full of glamour. The offer of a share, however small, in the work of fighting the *Iron Duke* was one that nobody could resist ; but it was with a renewed sense that it was all a dream that I heard the flag-captain tell the commander that I was to be attached, as it were, to C., the first lieutenant, in order to work with him in " B " turret, and that at sea I was to go on watch with him for " night defence." There was really to be a place in the ship where I could be when anybody came in without feeling like a small boy in a hayfield with the farmer looking over the hedge ; I was to have my times and seasons for arising from the settee in the wardroom and for going about my business like those others, the great ones, whom I had been watching and envying. So I began my apprenticeship as an executive officer, and with C.'s good and long-suffering help set to work to learn the rudiments of the uses of marine things and of the routine of a sailor's life.

One night as I was sorting out a mass of new and

confused knowledge I heard a stamping and a clanking on deck and noticed a coming and going in the ward-room, and on asking the meaning of these things I was told that the fleet was going to sea.

“Where are we going?” I asked C. in my innocence.

“Goodness knows!” he said; “we never know—for a sweep down the North Sea, perhaps.”

So, as for the first time I watched that evening the fleet weigh anchor and file in slow procession from the Flow into Hoxa Sound, and from the Sound into the Pentland Firth, I could only guess that, as C. had suggested, we were going out to parade the North Sea and to give the *Hoch See Flotte* a chance of meeting us if they liked. On the quarter-deck there was a group of officers discussing the outlook, and I listened with a lack of sympathy that I studiously concealed to their unfeigned eagerness that the *Hoch See Flotte* should avail itself of the chance. The sight of that horrid line of our own monsters on ahead made the imagination busy in an uncomfortably lively way with the picture of a great sea battle. It was a shock to realize that these folk evidently wanted to have one. To me the fragments of the shell of peaceful life and of the civilian character still adhered; and I knew that I should be greatly relieved to be back again in harbour adventureless. One cannot change one's outlook on these things in a day; and it was long before I felt the dawn of the professional state of mind—the state of mind which desires more than anything an opportunity for the full exercise of its training and knowledge. To my still civilian mind it then seemed strange that people should

be so unaffectedly indifferent to the horror of wounds and death, and it took months of the long frustration of the life of the Grand Fleet to make such indifference seem natural. But gradually, as the professional habit of life grew upon one, one came to feel that nothing else counted in comparison with the great good that it would be to make some full exercise of all that one had learnt. One desired action to give reality to the long days spent in preparation ; and the worst possible evil—an evil the possibility of which it was difficult to face—was that nonsense should be made of all the works and thoughts of those days by the denial of any opportunity of ever realizing them in the expression of action.

Now the procession of the fleet was formed, and the *Iron Duke*, leaving her berth, steamed up the line to take her place in the van. Low, rocky islands drifted by to port and starboard, lights lit for our passage flashed from Swona and Stroma, and half seen in the dusk the bluff headlands of Scotland wheeled slowly away into the distance. Night fell, and it was time to seek my bunk. My cabin, that I shared with F., a junior watchkeeper, was far down in the ship behind the armour. To reach it one must dive through hatches and thread one's way through flats crowded with the midshipmen's hammocks, down and up again and along, and finally down and round the corner. It was a week before I could find my way thither without taking a sentry by the hand to guide me. To a landsman there was something formidable in burying himself thus far away from the open deck and from the outer air ; it took some practice before he could lie down and go to sleep down there in peace of mind ; and that first night

at sea the practice was lacking. When I had turned into my bunk I found myself watching the side of the ship in the dim red light shed by our electric radiator and thinking of torpedoes. That was about the place on the side at which a torpedo would strike! The armour would break up and the sea would come in. I thought how much I should like to be one of those wonderful youths, the temporary soldiers at the front, whose letters and poems they had been printing in the newspapers. They seemed so unaffectedly concerned with high thoughts only—with the service of their country, the anxieties of their friends at home, devotion to their cause, and a selfless readiness to give all for the cause of their devotion. "They think only of England and the right," I thought; "and here am I thinking of torpedoes." I could see outside in the flat the rows of the midshipmen's hammocks swaying a little as the ship swayed. "Those lads," I thought, "although less articulate, at the bottom of their hearts are probably just like the young temporary soldiers. They are not thinking of torpedoes." But I consoled myself with the reflection that such singleness of mind is possible in early youth alone. To be simply devoted to a single object, high or low, one must be quite young. Time weaves round one the web of varied experience and complex interests that pulls one in different directions by many cords.

A low, humming vibration passed through the whole ship from the giant turbines turning away in the engine-room and from the shaft spinning in its long bed. Now and then the chains of the steering-engine shook and rattled far below. The hammocks swayed outside in the

dim light. It seemed that it would be cheerful to hear a human voice.

"F.," I asked the bunk at the other side of the cabin, "it is worth something to be at sea now and in this ship, is it not?" But F., who had a middle watch, was fast asleep.

We cruised for the next day and night, sweeping over to Heligoland and down the North Sea, but we saw nothing more than Norwegian tramps and British trawlers. The second night it came on to blow very hard indeed, and the Commander-in-Chief turned homewards. On the way home we were to do "night firing" with our secondary armament, the 6-inch guns, and I climbed up on to the forward superstructure to watch it. The superstructure is a series of platforms rising one above the other just before the mast and funnels, built up with little steel chambers and shelters that are connected by iron stairways. There are canvas screens to give shelter from the wind and splinter-proof mattresses all round about. But we were steaming twenty knots into the eye of the wind, and it burst across the exposed eyries with the fury of wild horses and full of lashing and icy rain. The wet steel decks and walls shone with lustrous black gleams. Far below, the surface of the sea had vanished in a streaky haze of gray spin-drift. The main deck was all awash with breaking waves that swept over it continuously in walls of white foam, so that it was impossible to come out from below, save upon the superstructures. The men on watch up there, wrapped in their loose duffel coats with pointed hoods, stood about in little groups in the gloom of the overhanging platforms looking like the groups of brigands

with steeple hats in Doré's woodcuts. A red canvas target had been dropped, and as we came up to it the long beams of the searchlights shot out over the sea with a hiss, wheeling slowly forward in search and flicking quickly back. A black lump crouched on the roof of one of the steel huts was the midshipman who was controlling them. After a minute or two a beam came to rest, showing the target as a bright speck at the far end of it. In the steel hut the muffled voice of the control officer was heard calling down a voice-pipe, "Green thirty, three five double o, deflection ten left, shoot!" and on the instant the ears were split by rending cracks and the eyes were half-blinded by a flash of intense white light that blazed out close below. A glowing spark, the tracer of the shell, jumped away from the ship into the dark and then seemed to leap straight up into the air at a mad angle as the shell struck the water and made a ricochet. Crack followed crack while the sparks jumped away to the target, and the voice inside the shelter droned away, "Up one hundred, right ten—down fifty, left five." The guns with their thunder and lightning were full of rage, malice, and excitement, but the voice controlling them sounded unexcited and even bored. "He seems to find it a simple business," I thought, "to control those powerful and complicated creatures that I have seen below there in the battery, all covered with wheels, dials, and electric wires and things, as complicated as my own inside. He seems to find it even a little dull. I think that I should want to yell and swear in an explosive way in sympathy with their tremendous and explosive energy. Probably," I thought, "there is more in what he is doing than meets

the eye." When later I tried to do the same thing myself I found that that very sensible conclusion was more than justified. It seemed at first an easy thing to sit aloft and to call out "One hundred, right ten"; but after trying it, even under the simple circumstances of a shoot for practice, it seemed even easier to sit still and to gape into the dark while the ship swirled by the target, and then to thank one's stars that the target was only a frame of wood and canvas and not an enemy destroyer.

There is a cheerful noise that announces to sailormen buried deep inside a warship that they have arrived in harbour: it is the thunder of the propellers reversing to take way off the ship before she casts her anchor. It was that noise which awoke me at dawn next morning, and on my way to the bathroom, which was along the quarter-deck, I saw drawn around us again the melancholy Orkneys. The horrors of coaling filled one day, and in the afternoon of the next the seamen landed for a route march on the nearest island. It was good after the weeks on board to tramp once more along an open road across the heathery hills together with the companies of bluejackets. They walk with a high and heavy but determined tread, and when they double they leap into the air at every pace, as if to make the best of their rare contact with mother earth. There was an occasion a year later when I had other thoughts about the seaman's exuberant and meandering manner of marching; but on a trudge ashore after the irksome confinement of the ship it was very cheerful and stimulating to see how much exercise they managed to get out of every step. When we came in sight of the Flow again on our

way back to the jetty we saw that there was something amiss. Lines of pennants were fluttering from the flagship to say that she wanted everybody back on board his ship again at once. Amongst the numerous fleet of auxiliaries, colliers, supply ships, trawlers, and drifters, there was a commotion. One by one they were sliding off from their berths with hoots and yells and drawing alongside of the battleships. On our arrival back on board we found that it was another submarine scare ; a destroyer had reported a periscope from Hoxa Sound. The Commander-in-Chief was up on deck, and the flag-lieutenant by his side was waving his arms in methodical spasms, semaphoring signals up to the bridge for transmission hither and thither. They were arranging a wad of auxiliaries around each battleship as a protection against torpedoes, and the trawlers and drifters were being sent to patrol the Flow. In a few moments, as it seemed, the *Iron Duke* had a big collier alongside of her on one side, and a couple of beef-boats on the other ; we hoped that they were enjoying the honourable nature of the novel service which they were performing for the Navy, in spite of its embarrassing possibilities. Until the daylight went there was nothing more to do but to watch the trawlers weaving their web up and down and in and out across the Flow, and to discuss the probable course of action of an enemy submarine that found herself inside the Flow at nightfall. C., who was a submarine officer of long experience, said that if it were he in the submarine he would find a place with a comfortable bottom on which to sit, and that he would wait there until dawn before he made an attack. That, we guessed, was what the Commander-in-Chief

thought too, for as soon as dark came the fleet weighed anchor and went to sea. If there were an enemy submarine snoozing on some sandy shelf at the bottom of the Flow, the only thing to do was to be off before the first peep of day should bring back the hunting time of early birds—we the worm. In pitch dark, without a light afloat or ashore, the five-and-twenty battleships with their attendant destroyers threaded their way through the sound and out into the headlong currents of the firth. From the bridge of a ship in the line a sharp eye could see at times the shaded blue stern light of the next ahead or the white glimmer of her wake. In the *Iron Duke*, at the head of the line, the Master of the Fleet had not even that for guide. He must rely on his reckoning by the chart, on the lead, and on that sense of direction and whereabouts which in good navigators might seem a matter of instinct were it not so certainly the offspring of long experience and laborious training and of no easier generation.

“He has to show the way to twenty thousand men,” I said to F., “and to sixty million pounds’ worth of ships. It is a responsibility that might be too much for a man in daylight and in open waters. How can anybody bear the burden at night, without lights, and in foul and narrow channels where the tide sets the currents surging to and fro like the tail of a millrace?”

F. said that the Master of the Fleet was used to it, and that he never turned a hair.

“I was on the bridge with him once,” said F., “when we were leading the fleet up a firth in a fog, and a rocky headland showed itself all of a sudden a few cables off where no headland was expected, and

he didn't turn a hair then. But if you take his pencil out of the charthouse—— ! ”

As the fleet steamed along in the dark that night, none of us in the wardroom knowing whither, we felt that we were homeless wanderers on the high seas. We had been turned out of our base at a moment's notice, and we had nowhere to go. We wondered to what mysterious haunt the Commander-in-Chief was taking us, and next morning, for those of us who had spent the night in their bunks, the mystery deepened when we came on deck and found the *Iron Duke* cruising alone with no other ship in sight. People who came down from the bridge could not or would not cast any light upon the matter, and when presently a mountainous island was dimly seen upon the horizon it might have been St. Brandan's Isle for all that we knew. At this moment a messenger came to me and said that the Commander-in-Chief wanted me on the bridge.

“ You mean Commander G., ” I said ; it was a possible mistake—at least not so impossible as that I should be wanted by the Commander-in-Chief. But no, there was no mistake about it ; the Commander-in-Chief it was. I suppose no man's conscience was ever so clear that he could receive a sudden and unexplained summons from one with authority over him without thinking “ What have I done ? ” and I went forward in great terror, counting my many crimes and errors, and trying to settle which one of them was so heinous as to call for immediate judgment from so high a quarter. Amongst many bad things, I thought, I cannot think of any one bad enough to bring me up before the Commander-in-Chief. It must be some dreadful complica-

tion like those in novels—by some fatal combination of accidents circumstantial evidence has turned up of a damning sort that I am a spy ; I shall be tied to a round shot and dropped overboard. Or it may be that the dream is going to take a turn and that the Commander-in-Chief is about to announce to me that I am immediately to take over command of the fleet. In that case it is high time that I, as a patriotic Englishman, should wake up. A weight rolled from my mind when the Commander-in-Chief came out of his hutch of a watch-cabin underneath the bridge with no frown of doom but rather with the hint of a smile. “ That island is Lewis,” he said, “ and to-morrow at dawn I shall anchor there in East Loch Roag. As soon as we have anchored I want you to go ashore with a file of marines. You are to make your way as quickly as possible to the post office and to prevent any telegrams from being sent. Get into touch with the central office at Stornoway and tell them from me that no telegrams or messages of any sort are to be sent to the mainland for the present. If the local postmaster makes any difficulties you should let him understand that you have taken charge of his office. There will be the marines in case of need, but appeal to his patriotism first, and so on.” He showed me the geography of the place on his chart, and explained that he was examining its possibilities as a temporary base, and that it was of great importance that no news of the presence of a battleship in those waters should be allowed to get about.

We steamed away from the island, and spent the night patrolling up and down. When next day at dawn we entered the loch and anchored in the shadow of the

rocky hills, I and James, the midshipman who was to take me ashore in his picket-boat, were ready and waiting on deck with the file of marines, and a large pistol to give dignity to the mission. The picket-boat was bundled out into the water, and we sped away up the loch as hard as she could puff with James at the wheel. It is well known that the guardian angels that look after midshipmen are very hard-worked spirits ; I think that they must be carefully chosen for their endurance, patience, and general ability. Certainly James's angel on this occasion served him well. The commander had given James a sketch map to show the course of the picket-boat up the loch and my way to the post office. James took a scatterbrained glance at it and sent his boat speeding up the first channel among the rocks that had a look of invitation. Of course it was the wrong one.

"The commander seems agitated about something," I said ; "he is standing on the quarter-deck waving his arms about in a discontented way. Are you sure that we are going right ?"

"Rather !" said James. "He means that we are to buck up ;" and he called to the stoker to pile it on. We dashed round a corner of the rocks, and the channel came to a sudden and a bad end—so sudden that it was only a bump on the bottom from a bit of reef that, by taking way off the boat, saved her from going ashore.

"I am sure that this is wrong," I said ; "we ought to have a three-miles' run up the loch first."

"It's all right !" James assured me. "Up there and over that hill, and that's where the post office is—the map says so."

And that was where James's guardian angel showed his exceptional ability ; because when I had gone up there and over the hill a post office there was. It was not the one to which I was meant to go—that was miles away—but it did just as well and even better, because it was much nearer to the ship. Finding that we did not return from the unexpected channel into which we had disappeared, and knowing, from former occasions, so he said, that James's angel was a person to be relied on, the commander left well alone and sent no rescue party after us.

It was an enchanted spot at which I had come to land; a place at which it was a joy to look after the leaden monotony of the sights on board. A rocky ridge made a strait of land between the sea-loch and a small lake beyond. The hollows of it were filled with velvet cushions of moss and carpets of grass, all of the deepest green, and there were rowans in the sheltered corners aflame with scarlet berries. Mountains rose upon the far side of the lake, making more of space by one change of tone in their blue distances than are made by all the countless variations of light upon the levels of the sea. From amongst the miniature summits and passes of the little ridge on which I stood glimpses could be had of the still waters of the loch and of the reflections of the hills therein. Above one crest where the soft moss was as green as emerald rose the leaden funnels of the *Iron Duke* and her stark mast with its pill-boxes. Their harsh, discordant outlines cut a hole in the soft and harmonious gradations of verdure, rock and hill ; and in their incongruity they had the shocking effect that the aberration of a lunatic artist might have who, in the

middle of a sane and natural picture, painted in some dreadful monstrosity unrelated to its surroundings. The post office was on the far side of the ridge, a gray stone cottage and farm steading strewn about with fisherman's gear. I marched in with the pistol and the marines, prepared for anything. To come between a postmaster, and that a Scottish one, and his official duties—this was certainly one of the most dangerous tasks that a man could be called upon to perform. But there were memories that gave a sweetness to the thought of what was to come—memories of the hundreds of officials in post offices all over the world who had heard of my modest wants with a wounding indifference, or had haughtily trodden me into the dust from the safe advantage of their official magnificence. I hoped that, when I entered with the marines, I might be confronted from behind the counter by a female back that would remain steadily presented to me in the characteristic way. "If you please, miss!" I would say in the old pleading tones, and then suddenly, as the stony back remained turned to me, "in the name of the King!" I would say, and she would find herself being marched off between the relentless marines. The Commander-in-Chief had hinted at an appeal to patriotism, but it would certainly be waste of time to make an appeal of any sort to one of those stony backs. I would go straight to the marines. Bitter then was my disappointment when I found in charge of the office no typical frock-coated postmaster and no haughty young lady, but a venerable old man of a seafaring aspect and a fisher lad in a blue jersey. They greeted me enthusiastically in the sing-song dialect of the Highlands, explaining the situation

to each other in voluble Gaelic as I explained it to them in English. They were eager to do all that they were asked to do, and hastened to ring up the central office of the island and to pass on my instructions. I did my best to impress them with the importance of the occasion, and with rather too much success, as I learned from hearing this monologue delivered by the fisher lad over the telephone.

“No, no telegrams for the present whatever. Yes, that is the orders. Why, the Commander-in-Chief’s orders. Yes, he is here—he is here himself in the office.”

I climbed off this surprising pedestal, and settled down to pass the day in the parlour with the venerable postmaster. My only trouble was the younger of my two marines. I had organized my army in two watches and set them on guard in the office, turn and turn about, to arrest the spies when they came with telegrams. The elder marine sat there during his watches as good as gold and kept a lookout for the spies; but there was a daughter of the house who was fair to see and kind-hearted in the provision of cold duck and hot scones for sea-worn soldiers. This combination of attractions was irresistible to the younger marine. Some dozen times I dislodged him from the kitchen and chased him back to his post in the cold office; and then, growing weary with the effort, I let him sit with the kindly lass in peace over the kitchen fire with the elder marine for chaperon, on condition that they kept the door open, so that they could see the coming spies from afar. Only one telegram was handed in during the day—a very suspicious affair, about the arrangements for a funeral. Whose

funeral? The postmaster said that he knew the corpse, but I did not venture to take any risk, and I suppressed it. At sundown a paymaster arrived from the ship with a sheaf of telegrams and took us off. We put to sea and early next day rejoined the fleet at anchor in Lough Swilly. There we stayed until temporary defences had been made at Scapa Flow that rendered it proof against submarines, when we returned thither, no longer a fleet without a home.

For the next few weeks we were still much at sea. We would go out for two or three days patrolling across the North Sea almost to Heligoland, sweep down south for a little, and so return to our base in order to coal and to rest for a day or two before we set off again. Already the menace of the submarines was increasing. Day by day the Intelligence Office, in its quarters far down below the fore bridge, was spelling out from collected reports the story of their increasing number and of their widening field of action. It was no surprise to the experts, I heard. They were surprised rather at the slowness with which the enemy was developing his submarine campaign. Had he understood his opportunity more clearly at the outset, and had his submarine commanders shown more enterprise and ability in putting their craft rapidly to the full uses of which they were capable, it would have made things very much more difficult for us. As it was, their slowness and lack of appreciation of their advantages gave us time to develop our protective and preventive measures and to keep them always one step ahead of the attack. Thanks to that, for two or three months after the war began the Grand Fleet was able to keep the seas almost uninterruptedly.

Our commanders foresaw that a time was coming when the submarine would enforce upon big ships a different course of action ; but in those early days the risk of keeping the fleet at sea did not yet outweigh the advantages to be gained by it.

Can the sea ever have seen a sight more wonderful than the Grand Fleet at exercise ? When the fleet was in cruising order the *Iron Duke* headed the central line of battleships. Around and about her the waters were filled, as far as the eye could reach, with line after line of gray leviathans, the leading ships surging ahead in a row, the others all chasing the tails of their next ahead in due and seemly order. In front of the battleships steamed an arrow-head of light cruisers, and in front of them again a long line of destroyers as a screen. Away on the flanks and far in front lines of heavier cruisers were scattered about the sea, mere points and smudges of smoke. On the horizon, it might be that one could see with glasses a line of tiny pegs, the masts of the battle-cruiser fleet, hull down, coming to some rendezvous to join us in our games, or pretending to be an enemy upon whom we might exercise some tactical manœuvre. Up to the *Iron Duke's* peak runs a familiar hoist of flags which means that we are going to practise having a battle, and the captains all pull themselves together on their bridges, and the officers of the watch groan inwardly. Hoist follows hoist in the flagship, and as they come fluttering down great ships and small wheel hither and thither ; the regular order of the lines is broken, and there follows what seems to the inexperienced eye to be an inextricable confusion. The flagship is turning in a stately circle, the battle squadrons

are turning too, and the destroyers are playing a game of follow my leader, gathering in knots of four and spinning round in circles like a humming-top. All of a sudden the confusion is seen to have been resolved, and the fleet in some new order is proceeding in a diagonal formation and in a new direction. Up and down goes another hoist, and again the orderly assembly breaks up into a jumbled mob. Shut your eyes for a minute, and when you open them again you will see the most tremendous sight in the world—the Grand Fleet deployed for action. To left and right the seas are empty now of all save a few light cruisers ; ahead and astern the battleships have fallen into a line whose ends are lost upon the horizons, ship after ship all ranged one behind the other in an endless perspective and tearing after each other at a speed that sends their white wakes surging across the sea. The bristling guns swing out upon the beam and rise and fall to the rolling of the ships in a slow, unceasing wave. This was the sight that the Germans saw dimly in the gathering dark of the day of Jutland; and from which, no cowards but reasonable beings, they fled, glad enough, after a night of inexpressible apprehensions, not to see it again at dawn.

It was during these long days that we spent at sea in exercise and manœuvre that I began to take regular duty under C.'s wing as a control officer at night defence. As soon as it grew dark the drummers went round the ship blowing a certain bugle call, soon so well known and so much disliked. It used to wake me with a start from an arm-chair in the warm, bright wardroom where I was dozing over a week-old newspaper. Up

on deck there were cold, twilight and silence, save for the soft wash of the waves that the ship was throwing off from her bow and side and the deep hum of the wind in the long aerials of the wireless. I went forward and climbed the ladders of the superstructure with feet as unwilling in spirit as heavy sea-boots made them leaden in substance. There were four hours of cold and dark to come. C. and I kept our watch in a little pent-house abaft the conning-tower ; its steel door was always stiff and freezing cold, and one always hurt one's fingers getting it open. Inside the seamen were crouching on the deck with the ends of the voice-pipes in their hands, and C. was settling down with his rug on a low stool. I did the same, with my nose on a level with the edge of the aperture in front, so that as much of the wind and spray as possible might be blown over my head by the updraft. We sat as in a box in an empty theatre with all the lights out. The memory of life at sea which will stay with me longest and most vividly is that of sitting crouched thus, slowly rubbing my nose backwards and forwards, hour after hour, along the edge of the hard steel and peering into the dark. As I sat and rubbed my nose along the steel edge I used to picture to myself what would happen in a night action. The infinite tedium of the watch would be instantaneously shattered by the rattling of the warning buzzers, and the voice-pipes would announce in a sepulchral voice "Alarm ! Alarm !" The searchlights would hiss and shine out, and then before I had time to think the night would be shattered by the flashing and crashing of the guns. I might see something dim out there in the dark or I might not ; shells from the enemy would

splash and bang all round ; and in the middle of it all I should find myself presented with a group of three 6-inch guns and know that I had got to shoot at something on the spot. For long I felt sure that the result, so far as I was concerned, was wholly speculative. There was only one thing that I could be sure of, and that was that my guns would go off somehow and at something, and at least make a noise.

But no rattling of the buzzers ever did break the weariness of those long night watches in the starboard shelter, nor any other adventure ; and how long they were and how weary words cannot tell. To sit motionless on a stool for four hours and gaze into the blustering dark ! The first hour would pass quickly enough in settling down on the stool and tucking up the rug in twenty different ways, in losing glasses and gloves in the dark and finding them again, and in listening to C. testing the communications and having a " dummy run " with the guns in order to exercise the crews. Talk might see the second hour safely out ; but in the third the passage of time went slowly and more slowly, and finally stopped altogether. We were then lost in a blank eternity ; moments seemed ages, and the mind struggled painfully through cycle after cycle of nothingness towards a goal that receded as it was approached, until hope died that the end would ever come. The body ached with lack of movement and the brain with monotony and emptiness. To look at a watch was a most fatal thing ; give it as long as one liked between looks, wait till undoubted centuries had passed since the last look, and its lying hands would taunt one with the passage of a few miserable minutes.

There was nothing for it but to sit and ache and struggle with drowsiness, nodding and starting and bracing oneself to resist the heavy clouds that drifted across the brain, as a half-tipsy man braces himself against the fumes of drink. At seven bells, with only half an hour of the watch left, time started to move again, faster and faster, and the last ten minutes dashed by in feverish expectancy. Now it was safe to look at a watch again and to count the minutes. A messenger has gone to call the relief; now he is calling him; now the unfortunate is turning out of his bunk and yawning his way into his clothes. He is coming forward; the clattering feet of men relieving watch can be heard all about on decks and ladders, and he is due. There is a fumbling at the door and a cross and sleepy grunt. A few words post the new victim in the state of affairs, and we get up and stretch and hurry off, feeling as condemned spirits in the lake of ice might feel were they suddenly to fall through into Paradise. Only to move about and to have little things to occupy the attention were then pure joy. Cocoa in the wardroom was nectar, and there were ship's biscuits and margarine which could be dabbed in the brown sugar.

After a time I found that even in these black, motionless night watches there were things to notice and to enjoy. Waves catch and transmute into something significant the faintest glimmer or haze of light, and there is no night at sea so dark but has some beauty of black, gray, and silver in contrasted tones. In London there was at one time a fashion in black mirrors, carpets, and papers for the decoration of rooms. It was Mr. Nicholson, I think, that set it, the painter of the lady

with the wonderful black furs. Amateurs of that fashion would be pleased with a North Sea night. It is all black, but black in countless shades, made visible and endowed as it were with dramatic meaning by gleams of dead white where the foam breaks from the bow of the ship and by gray films of faintest light on the horizon, and here and there by a fleeting sparkle where a star has struggled through and struck the water with its shaft.

For those off watch at sea there was the wardroom for rest and the quarter-deck for exercise. James, the midshipman of the picket-boat, had his less active moments when he would sometimes come and walk up and down with me on the plebeian side of the quarter-deck, which is the port side. The patrician side is the starboard side : it is best to avoid it for fear of impeding the steps and disturbing the great thoughts of admirals.

"This is an extraordinary world," I said to James. "There is a custom about everything. Why, for instance, do admirals always walk on the starboard side ?"

"They must walk on some side," said James. He thought, too, that it was better so than that they should walk about all over the ship, as some did. That was very true, but still I wanted to know whether there was any reason why it should not be the port side on which they walked. James did not know of any reason, but he said that it was always the same in every ship and always had been so far as he knew.

"That is it," I said. "There is a custom about everything that everybody in the Navy knows and nobody else does. You might disguise a landsman perfectly, and take him on board one of his Majesty's ships, and

the naval onlooker would detect him before he could open his mouth. As likely as not he would be detected before he left the pier in the picket-boat, for he would stand aside politely to let some senior officer get into the boat first. If you put him right about that he would remember what you said and hurry first out of the boat and so put his foot into it again. Meanwhile he would probably have perched himself, humbly as he thought, in the exposed stern sheets of the boat, leaving the sheltered cabin to his betters, and so have given himself away once more. He would not know that he should salute the quarter-deck as he came over the side; and leave him to himself for a moment, and you might even find him leaning over the side of the ship. All these things have I done, to my confusion. It is very difficult."

"You have done things a long sight worse than that," said James with some brutality. "I saw you sitting down on deck yesterday during working hours."

"There you are! Now that you tell me, I know that it was a dreadful thing to do; but one cannot by the light of nature tell the hours in which it is safe to rest one's legs. On board ship there are custom and tradition everywhere, ancient and inviolable. Look at that chief petty officer who is serving out rum. He is juggling with six copper pots; six fills of a pot of middle size into a big one add up to make six pints, and then one fill of a little one subtracted from the big one makes five pints and three-quarters. An acolyte stands by and dribbles rum into the top of each pot as it is filled, in order to make sure that everybody shall get full measure; he even gives a dribble to the little pot that

measures the subtracted quarter in order to fill it up too, although that is an unreasonable proceeding. It is a ritual ; it has been done in exactly the same way on every king's ship every day for centuries past, and let us hope that it will be done so for centuries to come. Look at the little cask that holds the rum, made of yellow oak with copper ribs. It comes straight out of a three-decker ; the pattern of it has not been changed since the *Great Harry* was commissioned."

James thought that it was a very good way of serving out rum.

" So it is ; there are probably a dozen other ways as good, but tradition keeps us to this way. Tradition rules everything we do—tradition so all-pervading and so strong that officers and men who have lived all their lives in it do not know that it is there. Everything that we do and say here is full of the past ; history colours our every action and almost our every word."

" I call that rather jolly," said James.

" So do I," I admitted, " and very inspiring ; but sometimes I wonder if so much jolly old tradition is very good for the growth of new ideas."

James turned the subject from this dangerous ground.

" There is not much of your tradition and the past about gunnery in these ships," he complained. He was midshipman of a turret, and found his duties there a strain on his dawning intelligence. " It is one new thing after another. All these X-chasing instruments make my head go round. You can overdo all that, I say ; shoot quick and spot on—that is the best way in the long run."

At the time the instruments that troubled James

were much of a mystery to me. Half-understood things seem wonderful, and I thought that James's gunnery creed was all wrong. Afterwards when I was in a light cruiser I came to think that there was a good deal to be said for it. But the things that I was learning to do about the guns in the *Iron Duke* did not bring me into contact with such high matters. After some weeks of standing by and looking on I had been given charge of the nether regions of "B" turret. C. was in general charge of it, and this was that turret also in which James's head went round over the machines that chased "X." The shell-room and handing-room were my territory; I stayed down there and attended to the modest, necessary work of ammunition supply. They were deep down below the water-line and behind a double thickness of armour, the armour of the ship's side and that of the turret. To reach them one must perform gymnastic feats, edging along narrow passages bristling with handles and pipes and switchboards, squeezing through tiny holes, and clambering down iron ladders. In a battle, I thought to myself the first time that I went down there, it will be easy to be very courageous here in the shell-room. There is so much armour all round that we shall be all right unless the ship goes down; and if the ship does go down, since it is perfectly impossible to get out, there will be nothing to worry about. If a shell comes in, the magazine will blow up, and there will be very little opportunity for worry in that case either. C. agreed with me; but he said that I might find that my crew was worried by not knowing what was going on up above. So far from the light of day, and without any means of communica-

tion with anybody except a voice-pipe to our own gun-house, we should not, of course, have the least idea of what was happening in a battle. The first we should know of it would be the dull thump and the jerk of the trunk that would tell us that the gun had fired, and more thumps and jerks were all that we should know of its progress. To remedy that it was C.'s practice always to tell us what was happening; and such adventures as we had while we were closed up at action-stations are known to me only through his bulletins of news from the upper air passed to us down a special telephone that he rigged up for the purpose in the trunk.

The work of supplying charges from magazine to lift in the handing-room was easy. It was not so easy to handle the big $13\frac{1}{2}$ -inch shells that stood as high as a man's shoulder and weighed nearly a ton, so I used to spend most of my time in the shell-room. It was very like a chapel, if one imagined that the bins in which the shells lived were pews, and that the revolving trunk that stood out in the middle of the room was an altar surmounted by a high *baldachino* with an ambulatory going round behind it. The glow of the electric lights was dim and religious, and the place smelt strongly, not, it is true, of incense, but of oil and bilge. Everywhere there were gleaming steel handles and copper pipes. A turret is trained nowadays and the guns are loaded and laid by hydraulic power. The copper pipes conveyed the power and the steel handles controlled it. When I first made their acquaintance in all their intricacy, "Nothing," I said to myself, "will ever enable me to understand what all these little things are for; there are too many knots of pipes and rows of

wheels and levers ever to be sorted out by an average mind. To learn by rote the order in which the levers should be moved is the best for which I can hope." But C.'s easy command of all these mysteries succeeded in course of time in getting a working knowledge of them into my head. Before being first lieutenant he had been for many years captain of a submarine, and life in a submarine, where the safety of the ship and the lives of the crew are directly dependent at every moment on every nut and joint, makes a man a careful husband of his machinery. I have noticed that good submarine officers get a new sense—a sense which enables them to detect and track down a defect in machinery with their nose, as a good housewife detects and tracks down a smell. I declare that I have known the first lieutenant come into the turret and point an invisible breakage in a pipe, like a pointer dog that has winded game. His mastery was based, I saw, on inexhaustible patience and minute attention to detail; he would have everything tested and examined every day, and was content to sit up all night with a sick nut.

Long as were the hours which we spent closed up at action stations for exercise when we were in harbour, certainly they were not too long. During the drill, C. at the end of the telephone would represent Misfortune and inflict on us a series of damages and casualties. First one pipe would be cut by a splinter, and then another; the lights would fail; fires would break out in the most dreadful places, and members of the crew would be killed; until at last we were working in the half-dark with only two or three of us left to keep up the supply of ammunition as best we could by hand-tackles

and the sweat of our brows. The last and most terrifying disaster would be the destruction of the gun's crew. We had then to supply an emergency crew for the gun. We mounted to the gun-house by the oily shaft that led up the middle of the trunk, so narrow that the arms must be fitted into it before the head, and distributed ourselves about the gun. The regular crew, in their capacity as corpses, stood by and watched us with a genial pity as we wound the turret into knots, ready to stretch out horny hands at the critical minute in order to prevent us from going so far wrong as to do damage. As emergency officer of the turret, it was my part on these occasions to sit on a perch looking out of a slit in a little armoured hood on the top of the barquette and to control the training of the turret by a voice-pipe to the man at the training-engine down below. "B" turret is superposed above "A" turret, so that the guns of "B" turn above those of "A." From the slit little can be seen save the long barrels of the guns of "B," a bit of sea, and sometimes just the muzzles of the guns in "A" as they turn past below. If "A's" guns were raised and "B's" guns were lowered, they would hit each other were the two turrets to be turned in opposite directions, and if they did hit each other a lot of things would break. I was warned about that, and the chance of it used to prey upon my mind whenever I turned the turret. Then one terrible day as I was spinning the turret fast round to the left with the guns level, suddenly into the corner of my eye, in the slit's small field of vision, there flashed the overwhelming sight of the muzzles of "A's" guns spinning fast round to the right and raised aloft. There were about ten seconds before the coming crack of the

meeting of two hundred tons of steel. I shouted and shouted down the voice-pipe, "Stop!" and still the turret kept on turning. Then C. leant over and called, "Elevate both guns." They rose in a stately curve, and just sailed over the top of "A's" gun by inches.

In those early days, when we were cruising much in waters in which an encounter with the enemy was always possible, we used to spend most of the days at sea closed up at action stations. As soon as there was light enough to see the sights of the guns the crews fell out from "night-defence" stations, and after a short interval for breakfast, and not always that, the bugle was heard sounding the call "Action stations." It is a call that is associated with moments that transcend in high emotion every other experience that man can have. Before every engagement in the war it rang in the ears of our sailors, heralding every gallant action that they performed. It cries an urgent order. Before the notes have ceased to sound everybody is on foot and running. For a moment the ship swarms noisily like a disturbed beehive; a moment later everybody is at his place, and the ship is still. Through the manholes and down the iron ladders into the nether regions of the shell-room its crew pours in a cascade. There is a great banging and screwing as we are fastened down; everybody busies himself about his part of the apparatus, to see that it is in working order; fire-hoses begin to coil about; men call up the voice-pipes and get sepulchral answers; the lifts clang up and down, and the trunk twists hither and thither as the first lieutenant tests his arrangements up above. The petty officers report "all correct," and we settle ourselves down on the shells

in their bins, to spend in such comfort as we may the long hours that must pass before we mount again into the upper air.

Of all the many days so spent the best remembered is the day of the Battle of the Dogger Bank. The night before we had put to sea in the usual sudden and mysterious manner, we wardroom officers quite ignorant, as usual, whither we were bound and why. At breakfast-time, being then somewhere in the northern regions of the North Sea, we received a wireless message to say that a squadron of enemy battle-cruisers was at sea. We closed up at action stations, and the fleet turned south and worked up to full speed. We were too far north to have any chance of intercepting such fast ships as the German battle-cruisers, but hope ran high that our own battle-cruisers would do what we could not. Down below in the shell-room we had just got everything tested. I was arranging my stool at the end of the aisle between the bins, and the crew were stretching themselves to doze amongst the shells, when the first lieutenant rang me up on the telephone to give us the news. A wireless message had come from Admiral Beatty, commanding the battle-cruiser squadron, to say that he had sighted the German battle-cruisers, that they had turned and were steaming home at full speed, and that he would engage them shortly at long range. When I told the crews they gave a spontaneous little cheer; and now, I thought, it is surely the time when even those most subterranean and silent of things, the emotions of the sailormen, will break through into some sort of expression. It seemed more probable than not that the day had come. Who could doubt that the German

battle squadrons were waiting in support of their battle-cruisers? Our own battle-cruisers could be trusted to force an action; the day was yet young; there was time for us to come up, and for the great battle to be fought and finished. It was certainly a high and emotional moment—one that might suitably be celebrated by singing “Rule Britannia,” or “God save the King,” or some other patriotic and inspiring song; and indeed, as soon as the men had settled back amongst the shells, being in good spirits, they did sing, but what they sang was—

“Oh yes! it’s nice,
It’s very, very nice,
To have breakfast in your bed on Sunday morning.”

After that one message on the telephone there were hours of long and anxious waiting. The hands gathered in little knots about the bins, and, putting their heads together, held long discourse in undertones, of which a word or two only reached my ears, usually a sibilant “says I,” or “says she.” Some slept; the leading seaman stitched away at his clothes, perched upon a pipe close underneath the electric light. Two boys fought in a friendly way, cuffing each other gently behind the trunk. Now and again a few of the men began to sing in a quiet, moaning way the luridly sentimental ballads which the seaman loves:—

“My God! my God! what ’ave I done?
I find I’ve killed my only son.”

and

“In a cottage in the country
Her respectful parents live,
Drinking champagne that she sends them;
But they never can forgive.”

Meanwhile the time, as we supposed, drew near. At any moment we might hear a thud, see the trunk jerk, and know that our guns had fired and that the battle had begun. I thought of all that I had heard in the wardroom about the relative strength of the fleets; how the lay mind was wont to exaggerate our superiority; how the Germans could choose their own time to come out from their bases with every ship ready, but we, who kept the seas, had always to have some ships away refitting; of the submarines and the incalculable part that they would play in a fleet action; and of the unpleasant likelihood that the enemy would concentrate fire on the flagship. On the other hand, we were the better men, and we had the better ships and more of them (though not many more), so the result was not in doubt. That we should lose ships was certain; but that the battle would be the end of the *Hoch See Flotte* was certain too. The conclusion was that calculations about our prospects of survival were unprofitable. Such thoughts might be natural, but I remembered that they were very unprofessional. It was better to turn the mind away from them and to have another look round the apparatus. The hours wore on, and at midday the turrets took it in turn to fall out for half an hour for dinner. When I came up on deck I saw the fleet disposed in two lines ahead. It was making the greatest effort in steaming that a fleet has ever made—an effort that deserves to live in the chronicles of the Navy. There was a fight going on ahead; we were making for it; and the German battle squadrons were probably making for it too. Issues of tremendous moment depended on speed alone—it was all a question of how many miles of

sea the squadrons could be forced across in each hour. Every ship was making a supreme effort that was maintained for ten consecutive hours. All day long down in the engine and boiler rooms they were working lives aside, juggling with their coal and oil to coax the propellers to turn a little faster and a little faster. Wonders were done. Many a ship succeeded in verifying even the most unveracious statements about her speed commonly made by the most ardent of her sub-lieutenants. An atmosphere of excitement seemed to radiate from the ships. For once those shapes which at ordinary times suggested in their impassivity so little of their speed and power took on an appearance of haste and urgency. Trails of smoke streamed back from their funnels, and the white waves at their bows curled high. Most significant thing of all, the lines were drawing out. The older ships, failing in a gallant struggle to keep up with their bigger and newer companions, were slowly—very slowly—falling back. Already the two oldest had tailed right out behind. I thought of their feelings as they pounded along. “We will keep up!” the *Dreadnought* was saying to the *Temeraire*. “We won’t fall back!” the *Temeraire* was saying to the *Dreadnought*; and then, as the gap gradually widened, I expect that they panted to each other as they struggled to keep back their tears, “Stick to it! We’re still in the line, old thing! we’re still in the line!” And indeed, at the very end of that tremendous effort, in which every battleship had done just a little more than it was thought possible for her to do, there the stout old ships were, far behind indeed, but still in the line, and had there been any battle for us they would not have missed their share of it.

Early in the afternoon down the telephone in the trunk came our first news of the course of the engagement. A wireless message had told us that the *Blücher* had been sunk, that the *Lion* had been damaged and forced to turn out of the line, and that the other ships of the battle squadrons were still carrying on a running fight. Another hour's wait, and we heard that the action had been broken off because of the mine-fields, and that the *Lion* was making her way back at reduced speed. Our great rush was over. We reduced speed, and turned to cruise about and to cover the return of the *Lion* and of the ships escorting her. "Secure!" said the voice-pipe—a welcome word after so many hours in the darkness and smells down below; and we clambered up to the light. As I came aft one said to me, "You can see the *Lion* from the top." I climbed up there, and with my glasses could just make out in the gloaming the point of her foremast rising above the horizon. Many squadrons of cruisers and flotillas of destroyers were drawing towards her and circling round her. During the next twenty-four hours she made her slow way back to England. The captain of one of the destroyers that escorted her thither told me afterwards that there were so many ships round her that his ship had to hunt about for a clear bit of water in which to steam. There was great anxiety as long as the *Lion* was at sea, and relief correspondingly great when news came that she was safely in dock and we could all go home.

As time went on, and as the German submarines learnt their business, the Grand Fleet changed its habits. It no longer went to sea just for the sake of being at sea. Unless there was something definite to

take us out—some activity, for instance, of the German fleet—we stayed quietly in harbour and took only a few days' cruise once a month or so for practice at gunnery and tactical manœuvres. Thus began for the Grand Fleet that long and infinitely tedious wait that lasted as long as the war. That some day the German fleet would come out and give us battle was an article of faith which it was imprudent to question in the wardroom ; but in our heart of hearts, I think, the hope to see that day grew very faint. When we were cheerful we listened to our desires, and said that after all it was impossible for Germany to let the war end without her new-born fleet doing something to justify its existence ; it would be too bad for future Navy Acts. When we were depressed we looked at some big new ship that had just arrived in the Flow, thought of our growing superiority, and listened to the cold voice of reason telling us that if the German fleet had meant business the sooner it had put things to the touch the better for its chances. The first week of the war had been its best opportunity ; it had not taken it. Was it likely that it would take a worse opportunity now ? But as much as possible we turned a deaf ear to that cold voice, and suffered hope to live on faith.

Officers and men plodded their daily round from wardroom to turret or control position for the monotonous exercises in gunnery, to the quarter-deck for hour after hour of tedious watch-keeping, and back again to the wardroom and the familiar food and the too familiar faces. It was wonderful that the confinement and the dullness of the life did not drive everybody crazy. The mere physical circumstances of life afloat in an Orcadian

winter are severe enough. First there is the wind. It is no question of an occasional gale ; in the winter it blows very hard there all the time. For weeks on end the wind sweeps relentlessly across the sounds and islands armed with a cutting edge of rain, the surface of the sea is blurred with spray, and the upper deck becomes a place to race on to and off again as quickly as possible. For all the radiators and steam-pipes, the ship's steel inside becomes very cold ; and although it is just possible to sit in the cabins, it is only in a bunk that one can find a really luxurious warmth. The scuttles in the wardroom pour down cascades of icy air and dribblets of snow, and the watch-keeper's brigade, that makes good arrears of sleep on the settles from 1 to 4 p.m., is driven to conceal the distributed attitude of its slumbers under duffel coats and rugs. Another cheerless thing in the winter of that northern latitude is the lack of light. At nine in the morning it is still dark ; by eleven the day has gained all the light that it is going to have, and that is usually but little better than a gray twilight seldom touched for a moment by gleams from a pale, low sun. Between two and three comes the dusk, and by four it is night again. To make up for the lack of sun there are only the silver streamers of the northern lights that trail and flicker frostily across the pitch-black heavens. In peace times and in more pleasant harbours the Navy is wont to while away its ample leisure by going ashore in the afternoon to see life and to take exercise. But in the Flow there was little temptation to leave the ship. The more repulsive a place is the more it seems to endear itself to those who are born there, and I do not doubt that the Orkney

Islands are dear to their natives ; but the most loyal Orcadian might be prepared to allow that in midwinter his islands do not present any attractions to the stranger. At first I made several hopeful journeys ashore, fortified through twenty wetting and tossing minutes in the picket-boat by the hope of a walk on moorlands, wild it might be, but with a wild grandeur. The Orkneys soon undeceived me. A sad, formless land of moss-hags was all that there was to see—a land of withered heath and squelching peat, all dismal with decay and seeming to hide gladly under the tired gray sea its soiled and smelling beaches of large round stones. Unilluminated mists covered it, and the rare gleams of the sun shone across the low islands with a level light that cast long uncanny shadows and struck no glad reflection from the black and rotting bogs. There were no houses but a few crofters' huts ; no inn but one occupied by an admiral ; no fields and no trees ; and only one melancholy, spray-swept road. So the Navy, for the most part, gave up its pleasant and refreshing habit of shore-going, and stuck to the ship and to control drill.

When all other resources failed, the last resource of all—and one by all means to be avoided—was to sit and think about the war and of the changes that it had worked in the once pleasant and familiar world. It was no cheerful matter to think about. Doubt would ask insistently whether anything could make it worth the while of a reasonable creature to lead this life. Threescore and ten years, it said, are all you have, and twenty of them are wasted in growth and in decay. What do you gain in this prison of gray steel walls and a dismal sea to make up for all that you are losing ?

Here you are cut off from all pleasures of the sense and of the mind. Day by day all of you here, and all the armies and navies of all nations, are throwing the riches of the human race—material riches and riches of the mind—into a bottomless drain that swallows all and returns nothing. Your work is barren work at best, and there is little enough of it. Is there any sense in sitting here and twiddling your thumbs hour after hour on a chair that is not even comfortable in a dim-lit cabin ten feet below the water-line? Why do you do it? Because you and your countrymen cannot shake off the vain illusion that it is a disgrace to a nation not to be powerful. In your own case against Germany you are all of you wont to say that right is better than might. It is. Then why not be content to be right and stop troubling about might? In fact it is mere unregenerate pride and pugnacity that make you fight. Get rid of them, and you will see at once that to be true to your boasted faith in right you must sit still and let the Germans come, resisting them at most in a passive manner only.

At this point, in order to prevent doubt from having too much the best of the argument, it was a good thing to call in James from the midshipmen's flat outside.

"Do you not think, James," I asked, "that the best way to score off Prussian militarism might be just to sit still and let them invade us—"

"Good Lord!" said James.

"—and then they would soon get tired of it and go home again, and we should have shown them that conquest and force and all that did them no real good?"

"They would do themselves a bit of good before they went," said James. "It would be rotten."

"The war is rotten," I said, to be fair to doubt, "and it is particularly rotten to sit and kick our heels here waiting for the Germans!"

"It would be more rotten kicking our heels at home," said James; and although I knew that he was right, it was not till long afterwards that I was quite sure about it.

During the unutterable monotony of those days any break in the daily routine, however small, was a keen pleasure. There was one that I looked forward to very much myself, although most people thought it a great nuisance. The anti-submarine booms in the sounds were patrolled day and night by drifters, and on each drifter there had always to be an officer. The first time that I went out on this duty it was with a great master of all the art and craft of seamanship—an Irishman in whom the flames of enterprise and originality burned with a soft but quenchless fury behind the gentlest of exteriors. A drifter called at the *Iron Duke* for us, and for the basket of food that was to last us for our twenty-four hours on the patrol. Sardines are the Navy's staff of life on all such occasions; my gorge rises in disgust at the thought of the thousands of the oily little things that I have eaten during the war. In the narrow and melancholy waters of the Hoxa or Hoy Sound we found our patrol drifter plodding ceaselessly up and down, and we transferred to her our basket and ourselves. Later on they rigged up comfortable cabins for us in the fish-holds of these drifters; but in those early days we had to share with the crew the tiny semi-

circular cuddy aft. There were an oil lamp and stove there that vied with each other in smells, and a semi-circular bench on which to sleep, if sleep would come to a body bent of necessity into a curve natural only to a sufferer from strychnine poisoning. Backwards and forwards went the drifter, down to the cove under the cliff where the boom ended, and up again to the old battleship that mounted guard at the mouth of the sound. There were three or four other drifters doing the same work, and we followed each other and met and turned in an unending dance, guarding the booms, and watching them to see that none of the buoys were missing. If a buoy were missing, it meant that something had come through the boom there. It might be a German submarine ; it might be a whale. No buoy ever was missing while I was on patrol ; there was never anything to do but to count the buoys and to watch the old battleship—a gray ghost almost invisible against the low islands at the end of the sound—in case she had some signal to make to us. On the first occasion, to which I have referred, as the early dusk fell my Irishman grew weary of our slow march up and down, and began to embroider it. We called upon all the other drifters in turn, chasing them round, grazing alongside, and passing the time of day through a megaphone. We called upon the battleship, and did not find her in a very companionable mood. Perhaps we were off our patrol ; but to remind us of it, we thought, when we felt so friendly, showed a spirit unbending to a degree that was almost displeasing. We left her, and coasted down along one rocky shore of the sound and up along the other, looking for something to interest

us, and finding only a couple of empty mine cases. They had been fastened as buoys upon the booms, but they had broken adrift in the winter gales and had been washed ashore. They looked very impressive; but of course they were empty, and quite harmless. The Irishman fetched them off with the drifter's dinghy, and towed them behind our drifter up to the unsympathetic battleship.

"I have two drifting mines in tow," he winked with a lamp, "and request instructions as to their disposal." The drifter seemed to take on the air of an idiot child as she winked. The battleship was drawn. "Stay where you are," she signalled; and then anxiously, "Are they charged?" It was likely that we should have towed them about if they had been!

When night fell the drifter anchored in a bay, and we went down to the reeking cuddy to eat sardines; but at once we were called on deck again. Something was wrong over there where the fleet was lying, two or three miles away at the other side of the Flow. All the ships and the shore stations had turned on their searchlights, and the beams made a shifting network of light against the darkness. Rockets were being fired. It was a submarine scare; perhaps one had been trying to get in through another sound. If that were so, perhaps one would try and get in through our sound too. We weighed anchor and returned to our patrol. All through that long and bitter night of January the fleet had paroxysm after paroxysm of nerves, in which the searchlights flashed out together and wheeled about the waters seeking for a periscope. All through the night our drifters went up and down the booms,

and there was no sleep for the officers of the patrol. In the small hours snow fell, and it became colder than I had ever known it before. It was so cold that no amount of woollen waistcoats and duffel coats made any difference; one might load one's self with them till one became a globe of wool, but still the cold struck straight through to the bone. We had to tramp heavily up and down the short deck in our heavy sea-boots, from the dinghy aft, past the deck-house, up the little hill at the bow, down it with a few running steps, and back again. It was so cold and so dark that at last I used to fall asleep regularly on the return journey from the bow, and regularly wake myself up by knocking my head against the projecting cornice of the deck-house.

The late dawn came on leaden foot. Vexatious hours passed between the appearance of the first gray mould on the blackness of the sea and the weakly, lustreless illumination that serves the Orkneys for morning light in January. When the blessed relief drifter with its load of fresh victims had come and taken us back to the *Iron Duke* we learnt something of the story of the night. A patrol drifter in another sound had reported a buoy and a length of net to be missing from the boom. Something seemed to have forced its way through there, and it might have been a submarine. The alarm was given, and the fleet spent the night turning its searchlights on and off, to catch the submarine if it made a night attack. Meanwhile an officer was sent out in a drifter from the flagship, with a cargo of explosives to be lowered down to the bottom of the Flow in places where the submarine was likely to be spending the night, in order that, being detonated there,

they might disturb the submarine's dreams. When one charge of explosives was about to be fired, a patrolling trawler came ambling along unobserved. The explosion made her jump, and at once she signalled to the flagship that she had suffered strange things, probably an abortive torpedo attack from the lurking submarine. So the general strain was intensified, not to be relieved until dawn.

Daylight, which discovers so many secrets that during the dark hours have remained hid, showed to a small cruiser which had entered the Flow in the twilight of the evening before an unexpected garniture of nets and buoys festooned about her bow. Not without embarrassment she realized that she must have made her entry less through the appointed aperture than through the boom. She owned up to the flagship, and the scare was over.

I contrast with that night the pleasant, almost luxurious nights that I spent on patrol in the following summer. The defences had long been completed then, and looking across the many lines of them that chequered the waters of the sound, a patrol officer could be much easier in his mind, knowing that the entry of a submarine was now an impossibility without a number of noisy and conspicuous events that would give ample warning to himself and to every ship within sight or hearing. A large and comfortable cabin with its bunk and cooking stove awaited him in the deodorized fish-hold of his drifter, and on deck it was warm and bright. The persistent night of the winter had its reward in an equally persistent day. The little ripples sparkled cheerfully in the light, and the sun circled round the

horizon, to sink at evening in a long slope very gradually to meet the sea. When it touched the edge of the world it swept along in the likeness of a red ball, against which the waves on the horizon leapt and danced in sharp black heaps. Even when at last it had set it did not go far away. All through the few short hours of the night a glow of light marked its passage round again to the place at which it was to rise. It was never dark ; one could see to read on deck at midnight. If there were distant clouds above the place where the unseen sun was circling, they shone all night with a greenish light that made of the Flow a sea in a fairy's dream ; but the grim islands remained at all times uncharmed into any graciousness. When the green began to be warmed by the faint pink that announced the visible return of the sun, a chorus of larks arose ashore. As the drifter approached the land, the chorus swelled ; as it receded, the chorus grew fainter and fainter. When at length they came, those twilight summer nights had a charm of their own ; but they took a long time in coming, and the special recollection that most of us will hold longest, I think, of life up there will be of the interminable cold and dark of the winter. The cheerlessness of it seemed to affect our very bones ; we wondered if we were not becoming albinized for lack of light, like the etiolated grass that grows under an unused garden roller. The isolation, the confinement, and the monotony were a garden roller that was squeezing the coloured sap out of us.

Months passed ; the days slowly lengthened ; nothing happened, and it seemed as if nothing would ever happen again. The smallest change of scene or of

routine became a great and exciting event. One fine morning, when all the old and almost forgotten world was beginning to feel the spring, the *Iron Duke* put suddenly to sea, and in the afternoon we found ourselves passing underneath the Forth Bridge and making fast to a buoy at Queensferry. The Government was changing, and we had come down south in order that the Commander-in-Chief might meet the new First Lord of the Admiralty at Edinburgh. But of far more interest to most of us than any change of Government were the sight of the green fields and woods along the shores of the Firth and the chance of a run ashore and of mingling with our fellow-men, if for an afternoon only, in the streets of a civilized town.

The next day I went ashore for a walk with James. Cities had less attraction for us than a green countryside, and after walking for a little way with the broad stream of naval officers that flowed citywards along the Edinburgh road we turned aside into the woods of Dalmeny. It was almost worth while to have spent eight months in our steel prison with nothing to look at but drab waves, drab sky, and the barren, unanimated islands, to see now with fresh eyes the loveliness of early spring quickening the woods that clothe the little hills along the Firth. Our first wood was a wood of sycamores on a rocky mound, with young green grass and ferns beneath. An epicure might choose the sycamore in spring for a tree with which to break a long fast from trees; its strong, sculptured form is so full of easy significance, and its buds of palest green, vague almost to invisibility yet full of the promise of the leaf, might be the original mother-mist of fertility

from which all the verdure of the year is born. At sight of them James began to laugh, and went on laughing without stopping all the day. The green leaves made him drunk, and he reeled from glade to glade in peals of laughter. We came to a lawn at the end of a grass ride that sloped down to the shore. There was a carpet of violets and primroses there, and James, who was dizzy with mirth, had to stop and rest. We sat still for a long time looking up at the play of real sunlight through the branches of the trees. An aisle of giant ash just feathering into leaf arched and closed above our heads, and clumps of silver birch shone into our eyes with bright lights of green and silver. On the waters of the Firth below were the hard shapes of two battle-cruisers, but by moving our heads about we could keep them out of sight behind the boughs. We tried to talk about the war and the new Government ; but James was in a state of mind that had only one means of expression : what he tried to say was always overwhelmed by a flood of chuckles.

“ James, what are you laughing at so immoderately ? ” I asked.

“ Lord, I don’t know,” said James—“ the Flow and all that, I suppose, and this.”

And it did seem to me for a moment as if here in the wood the thought of the strenuous life of service in the Flow, so earnest in its spirit, so lugubrious in its surroundings, was a funny thought, and that had I been as liable as James to inebriation in a wood in springtime, I should have laughed as hard as he was laughing.

Walking farther along the green rides of wood, we

came to a cottage. The good woman of the cottage, hearing the noise that James was making, and thinking perhaps that it was a pleasant and a fortunate noise, asked us whether we would not come in and have tea. We went in, and she gave us tea, hot scones, fresh butter, and boiled eggs newly laid. Food in the Flow was all very good and solid, but there was a tired quality about it: the butter was margarine, the tea was made with distilled water, the bread was dispirited, and the eggs had seen their day. After eight months of it, in the presence of the dewy meal provided by the good woman of the cottage, James passed into an ecstasy in which he was unconscious of all earthly things. Observations about the war and the change of Government struck now not even an answering spark from his intelligence; his spirit dwelt apart in the innermost, wrapt in contemplation of the essential beauty of three boiled eggs, oval, spotless, and refulgent. His ecstasy lasted until tea was over, when his spirit returned to earth, and we to the jetty, and so on board the *Iron Duke* again. Soon afterwards the ship was speeding back to the Flow. I was in the shelter with the first lieutenant, staring through the slit in the steel at the faint starlight reflected from the sea; and James was crouching overhead, a dark mound of coats and rugs, having a trial run with the gear of the searchlights.

During the first hours of the watch we passed through an area infested by submarines, and everybody was particularly alert; but as the night wore on and we came to less anxious waters I thought of how much James and I had enjoyed the woods of Dalmeny, and how dismal was the prospect of the long months to

come in Scapa Flow. After a sight of the woods in spring it was bad to have to give up their dear familiarity and to go back again to the strangeness and emptiness of the Flow. But then I thought of the people who used to like the woods as much as James and I did, and who had left them uncomplainingly for a strangeness and emptiness greater even than that of the Flow, and the thought of them made it seem better that we should be going back thither. When I turned into my bunk that night we were still churning our way through the dark; but when I woke up next morning we were back at our buoy off the barren shore, and at the end of the long rows of idle battleships, and in all the prospect of leaden sea and barren, unanimated islands there was no sign of green life returning, nor any colour save where the tide dragged an iridescent skin of oil away from the side of the ship.

Once more the days and nights began their endless round, and we went our monotonous way from wardroom to turret, from turret to cabin, and from cabin back again to wardroom. Each dull day crawled slowly past; but the months galloped, and high summer came with its green light at midnight before we had quite realized that winter was over. One day I had seen in one of the illustrated papers a picture of some British naval officers and seamen standing round a big gun on a bare hillside. "British Naval Guns on the Danube," it was called; and I was told that one of the officers was Admiral Troubridge. I felt a passing wonder what the British Navy could be doing in Serbia; but I had almost forgotten the picture when, at the beginning of August 1915, I had the unexpected good

fortune to be told that I had been appointed to the staff of this British naval mission with the royal Serbian army, and that I was to betake myself at once to Belgrade.

I left the Flow on 29th August, a year to a day after I had arrived there, feeling like a boy leaving school. It was as good as it could be to escape from the monotony and the confinement of the life there; and it was wonderful to be going back to the Balkans, and at such a time. But a ship, like a school, has an art to twine itself about the heart; to separate one's self wholly from a life which has become so intimately one's own cannot be done altogether without a wrench. Already, as the mail boat took me back past the great headlands, I forgot all the dreary days of the past year, and remembered only my shipmates and their kindly cheer, and the great moments that I had spent with them in early days when the fleet was at sea and we thought that action was at hand. The *Iron Duke* was a great ship in those days of her prime, and it was a great thing to have served in her.

CHAPTER II.

SERBIA—SMEDEREVO—SAN GIOVANNI DI MEDUA.

TRAVELLING down through France I peered out of the window of the railway carriage to try and catch a sight of the real war ; but night fell before I could see more than a procession of motor lorries winding along the road—the familiar torments of a later day—and an Indian trooper who galloped across a field waving his lance as if challenging the enemies of the Empire to decide the war in single combat upon the spot. From Marseilles a *Messageries* steamer took me to Salonika, calling at Malta and Athens on the way. The voyage would have been a dull one had I not owed to it an acquaintance with one of the most remarkable of men, Major Stephanik, then of the French army, later the first Minister of War of the Czecho-Slovak Republic. Before the war he had been an eminent astronomer, a member of half the learned societies of Europe. He was a Czech by name and birth, but love of science and of liberty had led him to choose France as the country of his adoption. When the war came he allowed neither a fragile physique, delicate health, nor his more than military age to stand in his way. He volunteered for service, and “being familiar with the stars,” he said, “I thought that I would take up flying.” In a fort-

night he had qualified as a pilot, and in a few months he had become known as one of the most intrepid and successful officers of the French air service. In addition, he had made use of his special knowledge in writing a handbook of meteorology for the use of air pilots, and he had put his general scientific training to good account in designing mechanical improvements in aeroplanes. It was astonishing to think that this fragile little professor, whose proper setting was so clearly the library and the laboratory, had guided an aeroplane through the clouds and had taken part in those unimaginable battles of the upper air. There was yet another thing that combined with all the rest to make him the most astonishing of men. Owing to the results of a wound his daily life was a martyrdom to physical pain so great that it would have made anybody else think himself entitled to live as an invalid on a couch. Never can there have been a more notable instance of the triumph of spirit over matter. The fervour of his idealism, of his love for justice and freedom, of his loathing for the enemies of these things and of his race, raised him above every physical disadvantage, and sent him speeding through the sky.

We went ashore together for the day at Malta, and as we walked about the trim streets and gardens of that prosperous town full of spruce officers and men all untouched by the war, he told me about the Marne and the Aisne, and of the price that had been paid there by France in turning the tide that had threatened to drown civilization. At that time we were still taking the war lightly in England ; our reasons were enlisted in it but not yet our hearts. We had not seen the war

at home, and we are not good at imagining what we have not seen. It needed such a lightning flash of revelation as the death of Edith Cavell to set us ablaze. Later on all the Allies were to become one in mind; but those who from the first had been fighting for their hearths must have found in us at first something unsympathetic and aloof. It was the astronomer pilot who made me understand that. Contemplating his example and listening to his conversation, I began to wonder whether there was not more to care about in the war than I had yet perceived. Until that time self-preservation had seemed to be the true reason for fighting: England had to be saved from invasion; it would not do to have Salisbury Cathedral shelled or the farms burned in Pewsey vale. But here was one who had that reason for fighting indeed, and in its strongest form; his native land had to be not preserved but redeemed. He, too, had that simple reason; but it counted for little with him in comparison with his passion of devotion to a high creed, the creed of freedom and liberal enlightenment, and his passion of loathing for a low creed, the creed of domination and force. To move the mountain of difficulties that he had moved more was needed than a mere instinct of self-preservation. A faith was needed and a faith he had, ardent and undoubting. Until the very end, in spite of every effort of the Germans, it was perhaps not so easy for us Englishmen to have that faith as it was for those of our Allies who were fighting in their own fields. But always thereafter I found the memory of the astronomer-pilot a remedy for a too material and prosaic outlook on our cause.

We stopped at the Piræus long enough to give me time to go up to Athens, and to call upon my host of the summer before, the chieftain of Chimarra. The long-desired occupation of his mountains by Greek troops had at last taken place, and by delivering his people from their peril at the hands of the Albanians had enabled him to come to Athens for a well-earned holiday. From him I heard the news. On the voyage I had seen no newspapers, and had been living in a fool's paradise of ignorance about the state of affairs in Serbia. An Austrian invasion in 1914, I knew, had been triumphantly repelled, and since then little had happened on the Serbian front. I supposed that I was going out to a quiet area of the war, where all that there would be to do would be to take part in artillery duels across the Danube at a gentlemanly and discreet range, with a Serbian advance into Bosnia or the Banat as the most exciting possibility.

To my embarrassment I found that the chieftain, when he learned my destination, hailed me as a desperate fellow rushing across Europe to thrust his head into the lion's mouth. The Greek newspapers which he read to me explained the situation ; they were all pro-German, and they were all gloating in enormous headlines over the news that the Germans and Austrians were gathering on the Danube in overwhelming force for a fresh invasion of Serbia. The moral, of course, was rubbed into the Athenian public. "Serbia is about to be exterminated," the newspapers cried ; "follow the idiotic Venizelos and you will be exterminated too." This gave things a very different look. The extermination of Serbia, it seemed probable, would include my

own. I began to feel that the chieftain's uncomfortable attitude towards my journey was not unjustified, and I was able to take part with real feeling in the ceremonies of our leave-taking, which, to my great confusion, were touched with the tender melancholy suitable to a parting with one about to venture on a forlorn hope. Elsewhere that day I met an odious little Greek officer of obviously pro-German sympathies who told me all about the German guns. "Ah!" he said, "you are going to guns; but the Germans will have guns too, such guns! much bigger ones than yours! Nothing can resist them! Nothing can beat the Germans! Venizelos would have us exterminated as the Serbians are going to be. Venizelos is an idiot. But our king will keep us safe; he knows that nothing can beat the Germans."

When I returned to the ship and we sailed for Salonika I felt a decided return of that sensation of calling on the dentist. It was very quiet and safe on the ship; but apparently it would be neither quiet nor safe on the Danube. I wondered what it was like to be shot at by big guns, and what one did while they were shooting at one. Had one to stand in the battery to be shot at, erect against the dawn, or could one go away and read the newspapers in the mess? And if one did, would they be shooting at the mess with big guns too? That was the sort of thing that it would be interesting to know about war, but it was the sort of thing that the newspapers did not tell one. It was all much simpler in old days. There were regular battles then that lasted, it might be, from ten till two. When a battle was going on one was shot at and one shot back;

when there was no battle going on one was not shot at. Now it was probably all quite different. I wondered whether now one was shot at all the time, and I thought that if one were it would be very trying. I should have liked to have asked the astronomer about it, but I was ashamed to let him see how little I knew about being under fire, after a year of the war.

At Salonika they speak seven different languages, and all the notices are printed in five different characters—Roman, Greek, Hebrew, Cyriline, and Turkish. Rumour profits by the babel, and makes the town its dwelling-place. The public square on the quays is at all times seething with wild stories, and when we arrived there they were at their wildest. As Stephanik and I landed, a total stranger stopped us in order to tell us that the Germans had attacked the Serbians on the Danube and had driven them back twenty miles from the river. It was quite untrue, but we did not know that it was, and I was surprised and relieved to find that there was a train leaving that evening for Nish. It had seemed unlikely, if the story were true, that I should be able to join my mission at all. I took the train, but Stephanik had to spend another day at Salonika, so I said good-bye to him on the platform, and I did not see him again ; but long afterwards I heard that he had survived the ensuing campaign and had got back to France, preserved in safety, but, alas ! for a time only. He perished in an aeroplane accident in 1919, a general in the Czecho-Slovak army, and first War Minister of the republic.

In the course of an afternoon spent at Nish in waiting for a casual military train to start for Belgrade, I had the

advantage of meeting M. Gruich, the secretary of the Serbian Foreign Office. As we walked up and down the pleasant, shady walk along the bank of the Morava, I heard from him something of the true state of affairs and of the Serbian point of view thereon. I heard that in Serbian opinion the attempts to buy off Bulgaria, in which the Allies were even then persisting, had always been hopeless. Bulgaria could only be bought off with Western Macedonia and Monastir, and those Serbia could never consent to resign. As to the military situation, if Bulgaria and Austria, strengthened by German divisions, were to make a combined attack, it would be serious ; and that Bulgaria meant to attack was positively known. It was imperative that Serbia should be allowed to get her blow in first, and to shake Bulgaria before the Austro-German forces should be ready to invade. But the Allies would not allow it. They were clinging to the hope that even now they might be able to keep Bulgaria neutral. The hope was utterly vain ; instant action was the only prudent course. Already the eleventh hour had struck, and it was almost too late ; but even now a prompt and energetic offensive-defensive stroke against Bulgaria might save the situation. These were not, I should say, the words of M. Gruich. I have set down not what he said, but the impression of the situation that I derived from his conversation. Certainly it was no favourable one, and when I left him to go to the station I thought to myself, " I shall get to Belgrade just in time for an explosion. I wonder how fast oxen can drag heavy guns, and if they can drag them faster than Austrians can walk." Next morning we arrived at Belgrade, or rather at a rail-

head at some gardens behind a hill. Belgrade station itself was on the river front, and being exposed to rifle-fire had been long disused.

The British Naval Mission on the Danube, under Rear-Admiral Troubridge, consisted of some forty seaman-gunners, seaman-torpedo-men, armourers, shipwrights, and so on, and of some thirty marines. The parts of flag-lieutenant and first executive officer were doubled by Lieutenant-Commander Kerr, R.N., D.S.O.* The military purpose for which the mission had been sent was to prevent the enemy from using the Danube as a highway for traffic to Bulgaria and from approaching Belgrade with their river monitors. Both purposes had been successfully achieved. After Kerr had accounted for two of the monitors with his famous picket-boat, called by a newspaper correspondent (but by no one else) "the terror of the Danube," nothing more was heard of the monitors, although they could still be seen through a telescope, lying behind islands far up above Semlin. The mission had sealed the river up tightly with guns, mines and torpedo-tubes. It had eight 4.7-inch naval guns, which are the same sort of gun as the old Long Toms of South African fame. They had been disposed in four two-gun batteries—two batteries up the Save and two on the Danube, of which one was near Belgrade and the other was about twelve miles farther down the river. Several lines of mines had been laid at Belgrade across the Save and the Danube, and there was another field of them forty miles away down the river at Smederevo (Semendria), both contact

* The Marine officers were Major Elliot, R.M.A., and Lieutenant Bullock, R.M. (temp.).

mines and mines of observation. At Belgrade and at Smederevo floating torpedo-tubes had also been placed ; so that if any enemy craft tried to get down the river there were three ways of stopping it, and in several places. After the mission had taken its measures none in fact did try. Our seaman-gunners and marines furnished skeleton crews for the batteries ; the rest of the crews and the battery officers were Serbians. They lived in huts and dug-outs on their remote hills above the river, a periodical visit from Kerr their only link with the world. The remainder of the mission lived in Belgrade, where the men spent their time in working at our arsenal in a disused factory, in keeping watch on the torpedo-tubes in a dug-out under the broken railway bridge over the Save, and in sitting over the keys of the observation mines in houses by the river. Down at Smederevo there was a small detachment to look after the torpedo-tubes and mines there.

The atmosphere at Belgrade, in contrast with the state of feverish alarm concerning this front that I had found at Athens, Salonika, and Nish, was extraordinarily tranquil. You would hardly have guessed, had you not known it, that there was a war going on, and that the wooded plain and ridges down below and across the river, which were clearly visible from the street corners, were occupied by an enemy. No guns were to be heard firing, and few troops were to be seen. I learnt that the Serbs had a small force only in this region—the army of Belgrade—and that their main forces were disposed along the Bulgarian frontier and on the Danube round about Posharevatz in order to cover the mouth of the Morava valley. Recently, because of the Bulgarian

menace, there had been a considerable movement of troops and guns away from Belgrade and Posharevatz up to the Pirot district beyond Nish. Of the supposed concentration of enemy forces on the other side of the rivers we knew little. It was rumoured that there were one hundred thousand men disposed from Semlin all along the Save, but no one seemed to think very much about them. So for the week that I spent in Belgrade we lived quietly and composedly, and looked forward to the prolongation of that quiet and composed life for an indefinite time. After the feverish anxieties of the politicians and diplomats at Athens, Salonika, and Nish, it was a great relief to fall back into the collected calm of the Service. So much depends in these affairs on what people have made up their minds to. Amongst people at Athens, and some even nearer Belgrade who had the non-combatant point of view, the idea of an attack across the river and of the hard fighting and possibly hard fleeing that would follow had seemed formidable and disconcerting. Here, amongst people who reckoned with fighting as part of the day's work, it did not seem formidable at all.

Its mine-fields and its guns were the mission's business, not the movements of the Austro-German army or the last desperate efforts of the Allies' diplomats to keep Bulgaria neutral, and it went about its business in tranquillity. The night after that on which I arrived at Belgrade there was a field of observation mines to be laid in the Danube about a mile below the confluence of that river with the Save and a little below the town of Belgrade. The mines were already loaded in a flat-bottomed lighter, known derisively as the *Goat*, that

lay hidden in a muddy creak near the site of the intended mine-field. The picket-boat was to steam round after dark from its anchorage behind Ziganlia Island in the Save, in order to pick up the *Goat* and to tow her out to lay the mines. There would very likely be enemy patrols in the woods on the other side of the river at the place at which the mines were to be laid. The picket-boat and the *Goat* must run right over to the Austrian bank in order to complete the mine-field, and, since the engines and the mines going overboard would make a good deal of noise, if there were any patrols in the woods over there it was very likely that there would be shooting. To meet these possibilities a company of Serbian infantry was disposed in the woods on our side of the river near where the mines were to be laid in order to return the fire of enemy patrols. After dinner the admiral and I drove down to the scene of operations, pushed our way in the dark along a winding path through osier-beds, and walked cautiously out to the end of a stone jetty. The Danube is some thousand yards across there, and the woods on the Austrian side could be seen in the starlight as a dark band above the glimmering water and below the glimmering sky. It was the first time that I had been in a place in which it was even possible to get shot at, but it was comfortably dark and we had the black shadow of the osier-beds behind us, so that I did not manage to have more than a very small snail crawling up and down my spine. Our seaman punted the *Goat* to the mouth of her creek, and reported that there was just enough water to get her over the bar. The Serbian infantry dropped into a trench at the edge of the mud by the river, and we settled

down to wait for the picket-boat. A few hundred yards down the river a hut amongst the osiers marked the end of a line of our contact mines. In laying a new mine-field the picket-boat must be careful to keep herself and the *Goat* above that line, or there would be an accident.

We waited long on the jetty in the dark, listening anxiously for the sound of guns up the river. If we heard that, it would mean that the picket-boat had been sighted as she came round Belgrade, and that she was catching it. But the night was still, and particularly still on the opposite bank, whence came no sound of life. At last there pulsed out of the dark the faintest possible beat and hum—the noise of a propeller turning slowly—and a black shadow showed against the faint light shining from the river. The picket-boat had arrived. The *Goat* was poled out across the bar; the picket-boat came alongside of her, a wire was passed, and the two set off across the river—but for a few yards only. Almost at once the low beating of the engine stopped and there was a muffled exclamation. The picket-boat floated helplessly downstream for a few yards and stopped with a jerk, while the *Goat* swung in and grounded on the mud. Something had gone very wrong, and of course it was the towing wire. A sunken tree had caught it and made a bight in it; the bight had got round the propeller; the engines had jammed, and everything was totally and inextricably wound up. All that we could see from the jetty was the black shadow of the picket-boat a little way out in the stream, with a break of light about her stern where the rapid current eddied and rippled. Splashes came

from her, and a sound of voices speaking softly but strenuously. The difficulties of the situation were only too easy to understand. A wire rope entangled in a sunken tree, wound round the boss of a propeller three feet under water, and strained tight by a five-knot current, is the very devil of a business to clear. It might take hours; it might not be possible to do it before dawn; and if the picket-boat were there at dawn it would be a bad lookout. She would be seen; a field battery would hurry down on the other side, and that would be the end of the picket-boat. We sat on the jetty listening to the faint mutterings and splashings from the river, and hoping every minute to hear the churn of the propeller and to see the boat jump ahead, but hoping in vain. At midnight we set the Serbian soldiers to work to cut rushes and branches of willow with which to disguise the boat in case dawn should find her still entangled. The rushes could be fastened round her hull and the willow boughs stuck on top of it in order to make her look like an island, and perhaps the Austrians would not notice her against the similar vegetation close behind. The admiral now went off to get the Serbians to send round the only other steamboat available. With another steamboat to stand by the wire might be cut and the picket-boat towed home. Without it the wire could not be cut, because if it were, the helpless boat, with her engines out of action, would float down on to our own mines. I stayed behind on the jetty in order to take to the admiral news of any change in the situation. A hardy Serbian pilot had gone over the picket-boat's side and, hanging on to the side of the boat with one hand, was working in the cold, swift

stream and prodding at the wire with a boat-hook, but without success.

I had nothing to do but to wait, and my attention kept straining on the woods of the opposite banks. Gazing at the dark band of them hour after hour, I began to hear the secret noises of troops and troops of unseen men stealing down to the water's edge and lying down there in the dark. I heard thousands come ; the air was full of their whispered talk. I could even gaze myself into seeing black lines of them drifting slowly into place against the more visible black of the woods ; and then eye and ear would clear themselves of imagination, and I knew that the night was quite silent and that the shadows opposite were quite impenetrable to the eye. About three in the morning Elliot called from the river that the situation was no better, so, in accordance with my orders, I walked back through the silent town in order to report to the admiral. There was nothing more to do until dawn, and we went to bed thinking that there was little likelihood that the Austrian patrols would overlook so unusual a phenomenon of nature as the birth during the night of a new and wooded islet in the Danube, and that there was sure to be a lively scene about the ensnared picket-boat when the sun rose. But we had not had time to go to sleep when Fortune spun her wheel full circle. A messenger came running from the river. Soon after I had left, he said, everything had come right. The engines of the picket-boat had been got to turn, and the coils of wire had unwound themselves from the propeller of their own accord ; the *Goat* had been taken in tow with a fresh wire ; the mines had been successfully laid, and the picket-boat

was safely on her way back to her refuge behind Ziganlia Island. It was the only occasion during the war within my knowledge on which Fortune vouchsafed voluntarily to clean up a mess of her own making.

The next few days, which were the first few of October, were passed in a quiet round of routine duties and of mild social diversions with the other foreign missions at Belgrade and with the Serbian army. There were signs that something was going to happen, but not very remarkable signs. People were drifting away from the town, and the stream of commissioners and representatives of funds and other benevolences had stopped drifting towards it. Each day a few more shops were shut, and it became harder to get our hair cut or to buy soap. Kerr meanwhile, as was his wont, was thinking chiefly about what opportunities an attack would give him of making himself disagreeable to the enemy. There was an idea that a likely place for them to cross at, if they did cross, was at Ostruvnitsa, some six or seven miles up the Save, where there were islands that would be convenient as a half-way house for a pontoon bridge. Kerr resolved to go up there, and to survey the channels behind the islands in order to find a convenient hiding-hole for the picket-boat. His idea was that if the enemy showed signs of making a pontoon bridge there he would take the picket-boat up behind the islands on a dark night and then sally out and torpedo the enemy's pontoons at dawn. He borrowed a motor-boat from the Serbians, and set off one evening from Ziganlia Island to prospect, taking with him some Serbian soldiers, Major Radoievich of the Serbian army (in command at Ziganlia), and me. The motor-

boat was a tiny one, and there was only just room for us all to sit in a row on the roof of the cabin with our legs dangling down to the narrow fore and aft ledge above the water. We stole off in the dark, keeping close to the Serbian side, where the willows made deep and convenient shadows. The current ran so swiftly that the boat could do no more than crawl against it. Away across the river there was the black band of the Austrian bank that imagination peopled again with keen-eyed and ferocious riflemen. When we came below a hill on our side of the river on which the French naval mission had their guns, some wakeful and officious person in charge of a searchlight there suddenly turned it on and set an illuminated disc travelling swiftly to and fro upon the water. This was embarrassing. Everybody on our side had been told that we were going up the river that night, but gunners are apt to forget themselves in the excitement of a "fleeting opportunity," and should that illuminated circle find our boat nothing seemed more likely than that it should be followed by a general fusillade from the French guns. Even if our friends remembered themselves and refrained from sinking us, the illumination would disclose us to the enemy on the other side. We were in no hurry, so it was not worth while taking a risk, and we ran under a bush and held on to a bough until the zealous fellow with the searchlight should have had enough of it. For half an hour or so he kept his light wandering about the river; then the Austrians turned one on too from the Bejania ridge by Semlin. The two circles wandered about for a bit in search of each other, met, and flicked up into the sky, where, seated together on the edge of a

cloud, they seemed to be engaged in conversation. We seized the opportunity to slip by in the dark below.

Arrived at the island of Ostruvnitsa, we did not take long to find an answer to the question that we had come to ask, because we were no sooner abreast of the lower end of the island than we ran aground in the middle of the channel. We poled off, tried again, and ran aground again. Wherever we tried between the island and the Serbian side we found shoal water. There was no way up ; the channel was useless for Kerr's purpose, and we turned to go home. I surmise that we had made a good deal of noise, splashing and talking, in getting the boat off after her numerous groundings, and we had edged out into midstream. An Austrian patrol had been disturbed. We had just turned downstream when, from the black silence of the farther bank, there came the spitting crack of a rifle, and a bullet went hopping across the water a hundred yards ahead of us. It seemed as if the report had pressed a spring in the boat. Like figures in a mechanical toy the whole row of us seated on the roof of the cabin toppled over on the far side and lay on the narrow fore and aft ledge with our feet in the water. The boat swerved in to the Serbian bank and sped away downstream in the shadows. Kerr said, "They can't see us. I hope none of these sportsmen shoots back." I hoped so too, and reflected that this was the first shot that I had heard fired in anger. It had no follower, and we got back to Ziganlia Island without any more disturbances, and with nothing more amiss with us than feet that were wet and rather cold.

When we look back at the days that preceded great

events we find it hard to remember that we did not know then what was about to happen. It is strange to reflect now that the events of the day next after our cruise on the river were of no particular interest to us at the time ; that we continued to go about our ordinary occupations ; that we had tea quietly in the little formal gardens, and made plans about what we would do in the coming winter. As we sat in the tea-house a stray shrapnel bullet came down on the roof with a crack, and that called it to our attention that the enemy's aircraft were unusually active in flying about over the town, and that more firing than usual was going on from the batteries across the river. Walking to the end of the street, whence the environs of the city were visible, I could see that most of the enemy's fire was being directed against the Serbian anti-aircraft batteries. There was one such battery behind a hedgerow on the down beyond the town that was being heavily shelled. It was crack-ing and spitting at the enemy aircraft, and all the time 5.9-inch howitzer shells were arriving round about it and throwing up eruptions of brown earth. We commented on this revival of aerial and anti-aerial activity ; but we did not see in it, as we might have seen, a hint of what was to come. I was to go by train to Smederevo that night to see how the detachment there was getting on, and nobody guessed that there was any reason why I should not go. At sunset I set off with Bullock, who was going down too with a truck-load of new mines with which to refresh our mine-field in the river there. We spent a cold, jolting, and uneasy night amongst the mines in the truck, and at dawn we arrived at Vranovo railhead, three miles away from the river and the town of Smederevo.

Smederevo is a country town of low, white houses with red roofs that cluster round a stately church and a big yellow block of public buildings. It stands on the banks of the Danube in a corner of the plain through which runs the Morava. A long, narrow island splits the river in two for a mile above the town. Above it rise the brown hills that front the Danube all the way from Smederevo up to Belgrade, and the lower slopes of these hills that fall towards the river are fertile and verdant and cut into terraces for vineyards. A main road leads up the bank of the river under the hills. On the bank below the town, and on the far side of the town from the hills, there is a mediæval fortress, the Grad, triangular in shape, whose mighty walls and strong, square towers enclose two or three acres of green grass. One of its walls is a river wall and is washed by the stream. Stagnant channels, which are minor mouths of the distant Morava, wind about through the plain. A shed on the level grass plot within the walls of the old Grad served our naval party as an arsenal. We had there a couple of torpedoes and two spare war-heads for them, twenty charged mines, the same number of uncharged mine-cases, and twenty boxes of gun-cotton with which to charge the cases. But the men of the party did not live there; they lived where the torpedo-tubes were, on the bank of the river a mile and a half above the town. The separation of the tubes from the arsenal was a mistake that was to cost us much—certainly it cost me an hour or two that I could well have spared.

Our Smederevo party consisted of four or five seamen with a petty officer, Grimstead, under Mr. Long, torpedo gunner, R.N. All the day of our arrival

Bullock, Mr. Long, and I sat on a grass terrace amongst the vineyards on the hillside above the river and ate bully beef and bread, and drank the fine yellow wine of the vineyards which is Smederevo's pride. Beside us was the little white one-storied cottage in which the party lived. Screens of willow surrounded our terrace to hide us from the snipers on the opposite bank, and the river wound below us in a mighty silver band. Beyond it the flat plain of the Banat stretched to the horizon, carpeted by woods that rippled in waves of light and shade under the wind. We spoke, I remember, of the Roman soldiers, who had sat there long ago, keeping watch and ward on the edge of the civilized world, and had seen across the river the Huns, the savages of the outer darkness, swarming and ranging and thwarted by the great barrier of the stream. So we were sitting now, keeping watch and ward, and our task was the same as that of the Romans—to hold the frontiers of the civilized world against savages of the outer darkness, or worse than savages—against men that had been civilized and had cast off the moral bonds of civilization. It was hard, I thought, to believe that the safe world ended for us with the silver streak of the river below, and that the peaceful woods beyond were hostile and dangerous. There was no hint of menace in the broad sunlit prospect, nor any sign of life save where a few wisps of smoke were rising from quiet cottage hearths. As long as the sun shone it seemed a formal and meaningless thing that the barrier dividing us from that pleasant land should be as impassable as Styx or that gulf that Lazarus saw. But when the sun set and the shadows flowed across the opposite plain

to settle in pools among the woods, the barrier became more real, and I was glad of its reality. It may be a false memory, born of what happened afterwards, but I think that there came then an uneasy sense of something lurking in those quiet woods—some fearful thing like that which lurks invisible in the shadows of a child's dream.

There was no room for Bullock and me in the cottage, and we walked back to the town that night along the river road in order to sleep at the inn. We went to bed, and since it was the last bed in which I slept for some time, it would have been better could I have had it to myself; but there were many indigenes there to dispute it with me. Rising early next morning, weary with the conflict, we walked out before breakfast to take the air and to buy cigarettes. It was market day in Smederevo. The sun shone and the streets were full of life and bustle. Carts were drawn up round the market-place, laden some with grapes and some with shining gourds, yellow, green, and white, and as big as footballs. Groups of peasants gathered round the booths where hucksters were selling sweets and fairings. The white linen shirts of the women and their black aprons embroidered with red roses made a vivid pattern of chequers on the sunlit square. A continuous and cheerful squealing came from droves of pigs that kept passing hither and thither about the busy streets, and no scene could have been more human or more peaceful. After six months of quiet Smederevo seemed to have forgotten the war. We were buying cigarettes at a stall, when suddenly the squeal of a pig gone mad rose into a wild and deafening shriek, and exploded with a crash and a dying wail.

A house a few yards up the street jumped, collapsed, and clattered down in a cloud of dust. At once the market-place was full of crying and shouting. Everybody was running up the street and away from the river. "Whatever was that?" I thought. Something wailed and crashed behind the great church. "I wonder if those can be shells," I thought. A short, sharp shriek jumped straight at us, and a house across the market-place crashed and crumbled. "Shells they are," I thought; "the Huns are shelling the town," and I told Bullock of my discovery. He said that there was not a doubt of it. "Then I am under fire," I announced to myself, "and this is a battle. I was right in my conjecture on the steamer: battles nowadays are not at all like those of which I have read in books. Here we are, two combatants, and a battle has begun, and yet there seems to be no particular reason why we should not go on buying our cigarettes. Yes, there is a reason: there is nobody left to sell them to us—the woman has run away. There is another reason besides: I feel a very odd sensation; I wonder if it is that I want to run away too. That is another shell that has screamed past close overhead, and it has fallen in the middle of the square. Now I am sure about it—I do want to run away very much. I want to get somewhere where the shells cannot see me, even if it be inside this canvas booth only. Do I want to do that more than I want to preserve an air of indifference and calm before Bullock? I think I want more to appear indifferent and calm. The truth is I am very much excited, and what I most want is to do something very strenuous as a relief from my excitement. One strenuous thing to do would be

to run away as hard as I can, but to stay where I am and to appear indifferent and calm is really at the moment a more strenuous thing still ; that is the best thing to do, to relieve this unpleasant strain."

While I was thinking thus we were walking over to the public building in order to telephone to the admiral, and to tell him what was going on. As we entered the telephone room a shell burst on the pavement outside, the glass came flying from the windows, and plaster fell from the ceiling. The girl at the telephone said that the wires were all cut already ; she seemed to look upon it as a joke. The hall outside was full of townspeople. There was an old man who had a cut on his bald head, and a boy was bandaging it. We were going out again into the square when a shell burst in the street in front of us, and the blast of it or the surprise sent us stumbling back up the steps. Another shell fell on the corner of the building, shearing it off, and then there was a pause. We advised the folk inside to take refuge in the Grad, which was not being shelled, so far as we could hear, and we set out ourselves up the river road in order to join our party at the cottage.

The square was full of fumes and dust, and we stumbled in the obscurity over *débris* and into big holes made by the shells, but there was no more firing until we were half-way to the cottage. We were hurrying along behind the screens that hid the road from the Austrians on the island, when a group of batteries opened fire again on the town. Others followed in quick succession, some firing over our heads at the slopes and at the crest of the ridge above us, some firing ahead of us along the road. In a few minutes the town and the

whole line of hills for a couple of miles up the river were undergoing a tremendous bombardment. The first series fired at the town had probably been meant as a warning only to civilians ; but now we knew to the full what we were in for. As battery after battery joined in until there were far too many batteries firing to count, we realized that this was no mere demonstration for the sake of annoyance. So tremendous a concentration of artillery must mean that a big operation was intended. And so far the heavy batteries only had opened fire ; the field artillery was still to come.

Arrived at the cottage, we gathered our party behind the screens on the terrace and looked across the river. Although some hundred heavy guns must have been firing in the plain below, their smoke and flashes were hidden by the trees, and there was nothing to be seen. A steady stream of 5.9-inch shells came whistling and whispering over our heads to burst upon the slopes above ; other shells of bigger size came with a shuffling noise and dropped in a place hidden from our view a few hundred yards down the river. Every now and then we heard four railway trains that followed close upon each other run past us on lines high up in the sky, and four dull thuds came from a hill a mile farther up the river. Clouds of earth could be seen jumping into the air up there and scattering and falling in a spray ; it was a battery of 11-inch howitzers shelling some suspected Serbian gun position. With a sudden volley of cracks a group of field batteries opened fire ; others followed quickly close below us on the far bank of the river, and soon the popping and thudding of the big guns was almost drowned by the smacking and cracking

of dozens of little ones. The field guns were firing small high-explosive shells at the Serbian trenches that ran along our bank of the river, and they were drenching our river road and the slopes above it with shrapnel. Their shells began to burst round the cottage, and the terrace was soon no longer a place in which to linger. We withdrew to a gully that ran down the hill near by, and we all sat down there under the shelter of a bank. Some peasant women with their children came hurrying down the gully and ran to us for protection, as people are wont to run to their kind, with however little reason, when they are in great fear. They sat down with us, and one of the women rocked herself and wept. She was holding something clasped to her, and wrapped in her shawl: it was her child, that had been killed by the fall of her house. Shrapnel began to burst higher up the gully, and, since there was no real shelter under our bank, we went down to the river road seeking for a safer place. On the way we found a bit of an old trench under a vineyard terrace which afforded good protection, and we put the women and their children there. One of the seamen stole away when no one was looking, and ran back to the cottage. He came back with a clean towel and wrapped it round the dead child. The mother was dazed then, and took no notice, but afterwards, perhaps, the gentle act lightened a little for her the heavy memory of her loss. After dark that evening the women stole away up the road, and we did not see them again.

There was a trickle of water running down the gully, and at the end of it there was a culvert or little tunnel through which the water ran under the road and

into the river. The culvert was about the length and breadth of a railway carriage, and the roof of it, that bore the road, was made of stout timbers. It had been cut in a step on either side, and the steps may be compared with a railway carriage's seats. At the river end of the culvert there was a clump of willows that served to screen its far opening from the opposite bank. I can describe it so minutely because we came to know it well. Here was the shelter for which we were seeking. The timbered roof was some protection from shrapnel and rifle bullets at least, and the willows hid us from observation. We gathered there, seated on the steps in the side with our feet in the trickling water, and we stayed there for two days and nights.

When all the party had been collected inside and we had restrained the sailors' almost unrestrainable desire to go up "on deck" to see what was going on, there was time to review the situation. The bombardment was, if possible, increasing in intensity; the whistle of the 5.9-inch shells close by came more and more often; the shrieking and thumping to left and right grew more and more deafening; and shrapnel was incessantly crashing close overhead. Now and then an unburst shell would smack into the bank a few yards behind us, or the case of one that had burst would come spinning down at the entrance to our refuge. It was certain that all this was not done for amusement; it was leading up to something, and that something must be a crossing of the river. If it were, there was a chance that we might be useful. A few yards away, in the water under the willows, were our torpedo tubes, ready loaded. If the enemy tried to bring a monitor or any other craft

down the river, or to make a pontoon bridge at this point, there would be an opportunity for us to fire the tubes. A couple of miles away in the Grad, moreover, we had our twenty charged mines. If we could get some of them up here, then, if a pontoon bridge were to be built anywhere below us we could float the mines down and so blow up the bridge. As long as there was a chance of bringing either tubes or mines into action we must wait where we were. But we must keep a sharp lookout, and particularly at night, for the first signs of a crossing. The enemy had only a thousand yards to come, and, once he started, we should have no time to waste. If he made good a footing on our bank anywhere near us we must fire the torpedoes, if they had not been fired already, and make a bolt for it over the hill.

All day long we sat in two rows facing each other with our feet in the trickle of water, and gradually, under the evil influence of inactivity, I found that my mind was becoming a mere mass of dull apprehension. The din and detonation of the shells beat out every other thought and feeling. With the distant pop of a big gun a wave of apprehension started in the mind that rose to its climax as the shell shrieked overhead, and sank again as it wailed away, to burst higher up. I caught myself addressing the shells with irritation as they went over, saying, "Go on! go on!" and feeling a surge of relief rise within me as the seconds, that I learnt to calculate so nicely, elapsed between their passage and their bursting. Nothing can be more enraging than to have to sit still to be shot at with no means of reply, and as the day wore on irritation rose to a pitch at

which it became almost unendurable. Since the enemy would not stop shooting even for a minute, night seemed the only possible relief. In the dark we could at least walk about a little and stretch our legs. But night seemed as if it would never come, and no day was ever so long as that day. The seamen were bored but impassive. Mr. Long alone, whose heart is on a bigger scale than the rest of him, seemed to find the proceedings to his liking. The longer they lasted the better he was contented, until at last his sense of well-being could no longer be contained, and overflowed in a stream of comment and comparative reminiscence of a cheerful sort that lasted as long as the bombardment.

Daylight crawled away by inches. When it was dark the firing grew less for a little ; no doubt the relief crews were taking over the batteries. We hurried up to the cottage to get food. It was not much knocked about ; there was only a hole or two in the walls, and a red-hot splinter had set fire to some bedding. We put out the fire and ran down the hill again to the friendly shelter of the culvert with a supply of bully and bread, and with planks on which to sit and to keep our feet out of the water. The bombardment began again in full fury, and a perfect fountain of shells played upon the devoted town. It continued all night without abatement, while we alternately dozed off into sleep and woke up with a start when some big one burst near us. There is a chill in the October night in northern Serbia, and we huddled close together on our planks for warmth, with our legs stretched alternately across the culvert and our heads propped against the posts behind. The seamen slept, but the noise of the shells kept me always a

little on this side of sleep. Once I was just off when I jumped into wakefulness again at the whistle of my own breath between my teeth, thinking that it was the noise of a big shell coming my way. It is a curious sensation to be half asleep, and yet to have the whole background of one's mind filled with anxiety and apprehension; there is little rest or refreshment in that state, and horrible dreams attend it. Now and then the beam of an Austrian searchlight swept across the dark, and showed us our trees and terraces in chalk-white light and black shadows. All night long reinforcements for the river trenches kept treading quietly along the road and padding overhead. When a shell came near them they scuffled and tumbled down at the mouth of the culvert with strange oaths. A little before dawn there was a great noise of rifle-fire miles away down the river. (We heard afterwards that a German battalion had landed then near Posharevats from boats, and that they had all been killed, taken, or driven back.) Dawn broke, and still the stream of shells went on flowing. At midday there was a lull, and Bullock and I, since we were tired of doing nothing, started down the river road to see if we could get transport with which to bring some of our mines up from the Grad. Grimstead came with us to carry a box of detonators. The screen along the road had all been beaten down by shrapnel, and there was no longer any concealment from the Austrian gunners, who were six or seven hundred yards away on the island. People are always inclined to think without reason that shots that come anywhere near them are meant particularly for them; but in spite of that, since Bullock has a commanding presence, and was wearing a

Marine cap with a red band, it is natural to suppose that the storm of shrapnel that burst over the road as we came opposite the head of the island was meant as an attention to us. It certainly seemed very natural to suppose it at the time, and we did so, as we fell down on our stomachs in the mud. There was a wretched apology for a bank at the side of the road ; we crawled under it, and lay as flat as pancakes while the shrapnel crashed above us, cutting the telegraph wires over our heads and smashing their poles. Presently the gunners switched to the left in order to fire on the road ahead of us, and since we could not go on or even stand up without showing ourselves, we turned and crawled back under the bank by the way that we had come. Where the bank was higher there were Serbian infantry lying under the shelter of it who looked at us incuriously as we crawled over their legs on hands and knees. Hot, breathless, exhausted with crawling, and begrimed with the filth of the ditch, we got back at last to the culvert. " Good old culvert ! " said Bullock as we settled ourselves panting on the planks, and I too thought that I had not made enough of it before. Already it had entwined itself in my affections, although I was under no illusion about the protection that it gave. Down the road I had seen the contours of the vineyard terraces changing, and the chestnut trees and willow hedges leaping into the air when the 11-inch shells struck them, and I had had to wriggle and to roll in order to dodge stout telegraph poles that had been shot into splinters by the shrapnel. If a big shell should fall anywhere near our refuge the sides of it would shut up like a telescope, as railway carriages shut up in a collision, and a shrapnel bursting

too close overhead would smash the roof to atoms. But it was a great deal better than nothing, and we began to feel towards it as one feels towards one's home.

So another night passed and another day. The bombardment continued unabated, and we never moved more than a few yards away from the culvert. Again night fell, and the enemy's fire slackened. We crept out, drank from the spring, and ate bread, ducking under cover when the searchlight swept along. An orderly arrived with a letter from Major Srb, who was in command of the artillery. Our interpreter pretended to read it by the light of a match that we hid behind a screen of coats. He said hurriedly, "He says you are to be very careful; he expects the Austrians to cross to-night." It was clear that he was in such a blue funk of the light that he had not really read the letter. He was taken into an enclosed shelter in the neighbouring trench and made to spell out its true meaning. In fact Srb had written, "I expect the Grad to be bombarded to-night. I want your explosives removed to a place of safety, lest an explosion should injure my men there." We had no means of obtaining transport to remove all the stuff, which would have required nine bullock carts. We agreed that the best that we could do to meet Srb's wishes was to lift it all from the exposed shed inside the Grad, and to leave it spaced out under the wall of the enclosure on the inshore side, where it would be protected from direct hits. Falling stones from the wall would not detonate it, and it would be practically safe there. I and Grimstead were the folk to go and do this. Franja, our commissary, would come with me as guide.

By now the culvert had thoroughly entwined itself in my affections as a haven of refuge, and I did not at all like leaving it ; but it was good to have something to do. We crept out and along the dark road, that was soft with mud after a day of showers. Before we had gone a few yards the field guns began to crack again all along the island ahead of us. It was pitch dark, but every sound that we made must have been audible across the water. We walked as fast as might be on flat feet, blessing the soft places, cursing those which crunched. At the head of the island we came into very severe shrapnel fire. The flashes followed each other incessantly along the road, and the "whiz-bang" of the bursts kept us ducking and crouching. A nightmare-like thing was that the road was snared with fallen telegraph wires that kept on entangling our feet, and from which we could not free ourselves in the dark without a horrid jangling noise. One such noise seemed to concentrate the fire on us. In the dark I could see spent shrapnel bullets, glowing red-hot, and jerked across the road like marbles. A splinter or something grazed the corner of my eyebrow and made a bleeding scratch. We stole on, spaced out to twenty yards to avoid a tramp. I wanted very much to lie down under the hedge, and I think that it would have been impossible to face the detonations of the shrapnel but for the entirely mistaken belief that surely one would have just time enough to dodge the next one when it came.

It seemed to last for ever ; it did take a quarter of an hour to get past the exposed part of the road and to reach the embankment and the first of the shelter trenches on the river front of the town. In them there

was comparative safety, and we tumbled down into the first, one by one, and I at least with great relief. We had had the same sort of fun that the tin rabbits have in the shooting galleries. It was still difficult going; the trenches had been pounded into holes and mounds by high-explosive shells, and they were slimy with mud. We fell and floundered from hole to hole. The soldiers were gathered in silent knots about the killed and wounded. In the dark one could see them as blots only on the ground amongst the shining pools. The wounded made no sound; but sometimes, when one of them saw a strange uniform passing, he would say in a low voice, "*Ranyen*" (wounded), and no more. The least noise drew fire from across the river. So we came out of the trenches and into the dark town. The houses lay about the streets. We passed the ruins of the military station where we had been when the first shells fell, and got into the Grad, where all was still quiet. Franja, the commissary, could talk no English, and an effort to get soldiers to help us from the *narednik* (sergeant) in charge ran badly aground. The *narednik*, so far as I could make out, kept assuring us that the Grad never had been bombarded and never would be bombarded, and that it was quite needless to do anything. A lucky chance disclosed the fact that Franja could speak German. We came to close quarters, and at last a dozen weary soldiers were marched up from a gun position on the river side of the enclosure. The soldiers were worn out, and very nervous of the strange burdens which we called upon them to carry; they kept putting them down on the ground and sitting down themselves in the dark without saying a word or answering when

exhorted. By patting them on the back and assuring them that everything was quite all right, slowly we got the lot lifted out of the shed, carried through a low postern, and spaced out at ten yards' interval on the protected side of the inshore wall. It was now midnight, and there was only one more box of gun-cotton left to move when there came the familiar screech and flash, and a 5.9-inch shell fell and burst within the Grad. We knocked off, having done what we had come to do, and our soldiers disappeared into the town ; but the shot was a stray one, because the bombardment that now began afresh was not of the Grad but of the town beyond, and the shells flew over our heads. The fire was so hot that it seemed impossible to get back through the town, and I preferred not to pass along the river road again until there should be something more encouraging in the way of a lull. The Grad was as good a place in which to stay as any other, so I asked the *narednik* if there was anywhere to sleep. A cellar in a ruined building just by the gate was found, but the light of a match showed it to be so full of wounded and refugees that there was not a foot of clear space. Next he showed me a tiny penthouse of wood that he had built up against the wall of the Grad itself, the size and height of a rabbit hutch. There were six men stretched under it already, but he assured me that they were some of the best burghers of the town. A straw palliasse was thrust in, and as it was now raining hard and very cold, I and Grimstead were glad to crawl under its shelter. Above us rose the thick old wall, some thirty feet high ; on the right, towards the river, a tower cut the night sky ; before us the ruins of the town

were clearly visible. Bugs from the palliasse crawled over my face, but I was so done that not even that could prevent me from dozing off. About 3 a.m. I was awakened by a terrific explosion and crash by my side. The bombardment of the Grad had begun, and there followed the worst of all that time. It was pitch dark ; all the enemy's big howitzers, that great performing troupe that he carried about Europe for his gala performances, were firing at the Grad, their shells following each other in a procession, whizzing over the wall just above our heads, visible meteors of light flashing down out of the dark and bursting among the ruins a few yards ahead. Their fragments flew back and struck flashes of light out of the stones above us. Some burst behind us in the Grad ; others struck the wall, and part of the top of it fell over in our direction, and bits thundered on our rabbit hutch. By chance none were big enough to come through it. The people who had been sleeping under the wall were shrieking and running away ; but all the ground before us was under heavy fire from the big shells, especially some very large shrapnel, and as usual there was no place to which to run which was any better than where we were. The wall was some cover, and the stones falling from the top of it were a minor risk. After a little we got up and stood in the rain with our backs close against it. The ruins of the town took fire and burnt with a low flickering light. In one crashing detonation I saw the outline of the tower on our right crumble and change. During this time an 11-inch shell fell on a gun emplacement inside the Grad fifty yards away, killing or wounding eleven of the gun's crew out of fourteen.

After an hour the storm of shells slackened and ceased, and we crawled back under our penthouse. Grimstead and I were now alone, and I was uneasy because I thought that after so many hours of incessant bombardment a crossing was due, and I guessed that this last display was to prevent reinforcements for the river trenches from being brought up through the town. We dozed off. I was awakened by some one shouting and shaking my shoulder. It was the faithful Franja, who had stuck it out in some corner near by. "*Herr Capitan*," he was shouting, "*sie kommen*." No doubt whom he meant. I listened, and the guns were absolutely still—a sinister change; but all along the river front there was a crackling of musketry, and suddenly from the island, like mad little birds hopping on to the scene after the recent earthquake, there came the noise of machine guns. In the dark, I think, that was the wickedest and most suggestive sound of all. There was something impersonal about the big shells, but that intermittent popping seemed to tell the personal presence of the devil himself. Franja shouted that boats had already landed on the river front. I ran up a ruined wall, and saw, in the first glimmer of dawn, a quarter of a mile away across the flats, some dark blots on the water between the island and the town. Rifle-fire began within a few hundred yards and behind the Grad. Whether it was ours or the enemy's we did not know, so, as we had nothing left to do in the Grad, Grimstead, Franja, and I started out into the town, up the main street, and away from the river. The light of the burning town enabled us to see the timbers and walls that had fallen across the street and the pits dug by

the shells; but it was slow going. A stray bullet or two flipped on the stones; a few men and women were fleeing by the same way. The women grasped at our hands; but what could we do but tell them that they were all right and encourage them to keep on in the way in which they were going? After a mile I felt that we were clear, and we fell into a tired tramp up the main road to Vranovo, the railhead, there to get on to the telephone and to await developments.

Grimstead summarized the situation well. "Now there's some," he said, "as might say, 'Why run?' but to me it seems only right like."

After two days spent working with Srb at his headquarters on a hill above the river, days during which the enemy was making good his footing on the Serbian side, I went with Grimstead to a village, Kolare, below the hill where Bullock and the rest of our party from the culvert had now arrived. He told me that at 3 a.m. on the morning of the crossing (an hour or two before I evacuated the Grad) the full force of the field guns had been turned on to our culvert and the road near by. The top was blown off the culvert by a shrapnel shell; the Germans began to land up and down the road; and the party made off up the hill under heavy fire. Before they left they tried to fire the torpedoes, but they had been so much knocked about by shrapnel that they were useless.

We had lost all our detonators in the wreck of the cottage, and there was nothing more to be done with the mines. Admiral Troubridge had sent us a message from Belgrade that we were to join him at Chupria (near Nish) "as soon as possible," and

so, since there was nothing now left for us to do at Smederevo, it was our business to clear out. I was uneasy about our position at Kolare, because I had seen no occupied trenches and no forces between us and the places at which I knew that the enemy had landed. We tried to get carts to take us at once to the railhead in order to catch a military train, but we did not succeed in doing so, and it fell out that the party settled down in Kolare for the night. Bullock, Long, and I lay down in a farmhouse in our clothes, and we quartered the men at a rest-house near at hand. At midnight I was awakened by a voice shouting German words into my ear. Half awake, I had a horrid moment of consternation, believing that the enemy was in the room, and then I perceived the face of the faithful Franja.

“ Even such a man,
So dull, so dead with grief, so woebegone,
Drew Priam’s curtain at the dead of night,
And would have told him half his Troy was burned.”

He said that he had woke and gone out into the street, where he had found people fleeing from the village, and had heard heavy rifle-fire on Tsarina Hill close above. We ran out, and found that it was true. In the dark I fell over a bullock, one in a train of military carts that filled the street, ready to move off; there was a battery amongst them. A few dim figures splashed by—the last of the townsfolk. We learnt from an officer that the railhead was already evacuated. Hastily our men were dug out and mustered; with an addition from Belgrade the party now numbered sixteen. We assembled before the inn, and I cross-examined the host

as to the ways of retreat. Franja was indomitable, and his German was our stand-by. I learnt that in addition to the main track to the railhead there was a by-track to Palanka, a small town on the Belgrade-Nish line, but that it was eight hours' march thither. Local opinion was that we must make for the railhead and risk it ; but I thought of what we had heard about its evacuation, of the position of the enemy when I had last seen him, of hostile cavalry patrols, and of the risk to a foreign party in getting involved in the outskirts of an action that was going badly for us, and I decided to go the whole hog, and to make a forced march to Palanka. Franja was sent off to find a guide, and in a few minutes the excellent fellow came back with an aged peasant. We fell into line and set off into the dark.

It was another nightmare. The tracks were feet deep in mud and slippery as ice. The sailormen were upset by being hauled out of bed at dead of night, and by the novel conditions of the march, and they were full of lamentations. Nor were they very good walkers : they could move at a crawl of a mile an hour only. There were deep drainage trenches by the side of the track, and they kept on falling into them with a clatter and cursing. For fear of the effect of a foreign tongue on Serbian stragglers they were forbidden to speak above a whisper, but it was impossible to keep them quiet. The guide lost his nerve and hurried on in front. Tired of hissing "*Cheka*" (go slow) at him, I took him by the scruff of the neck and made him walk behind me. Then he remembered his wife and family, and refused to walk at all, and a seaman had to be put to walk beside him holding his arm. Before we had

gone ten minutes I found that he had made a mistake : he had taken a track that would lead us for three miles towards the railhead and parallel to the advancing enemy before we could turn off on our true route to Palanka. Straight ahead of us as we were marching, and a mile or two away out in the plain of the Morava, where most of the fighting was going on, we saw the flashing of guns, and sometimes a pretty star-shell that sailed up into the sky ; and that made the party uneasy and kept them asking questions. From the ridge above the village which we had left, and about half a mile away, there came a furious outburst of rifle and machine-gun fire ; but still it was vain to try to hurry the sailormen. They trod gingerly through the dark and fell into the ditch. I longed for dawn now as urgently as during the preceding days I had longed for the dark. We heard on all sides of us the retreating Serbian soldiers calling to each other as they passed us in the fields. After an age we reached the highroad and the turn that would take us away from the enemy and towards Palanka. A bright light showed amongst trees down the road. So bad by this time was the state of the nerves of our guide that he could hardly be got to approach it ; but it was only a collection of refugees from Kolare in bullock carts by the roadside. An hour later we came to a rest-house, packed with more refugees, where we got bread and wine which greatly improved the sailormen's spirits. After that they walked better, and as we slowly put the miles behind us I felt that risk from enemy pickets was gradually disappearing.

Day dawned ; the men stepped out. By ten o'clock our twenty-five-mile march was over, and we clattered

into Palanka, a quiet country town that looked as if it had never heard of war. Our luck held; a military train was passing. We boarded it, and a twelve hours' ride in a truck took us to Chupria, not far from Nish, where we found the admiral and the rest of the mission.

It was not until six months later, and in the strangely contrasted scene of a summer garden lawn that sloped to the Thames, that I was to hear from Srb the story of what happened to him and to the Smederevo force after that night of confusion on which we escaped by the skin of our teeth from Kolare. They held out for another day in the Grad and in the ruins of Smederevo against the force that had landed on the southern bank of the river near Posharevats and was marching along it to join hands with the other force that had crossed at Belgrade. When driven thence they took up positions in the hills above the town, and defended themselves there for three days more. Separated at length from their own main body that was retreating southwards from Posharevats, and in danger of having their retreat cut off, they made a detour through the hills, and succeeded in winning through to join the main Serbian armies that were concentrating at Nish.

The day after we arrived at Chupria I fell ill, and was sent to a Serbian hospital at Nish and thence to Lady Paget's hospital at Uskub. It took two nights in a crowded train to get there, and I had hardly been put to bed in an exquisitely clean ward that was a paradise after the culvert and the railway trucks, when events began to move again. Owing to the Bulgars' advance from Strumnitsa the railway to Salonika was in imminent danger. There were French troops at Ghevgeli, but

they were not ready to attack. Two wounded marines from Belgrade and I, who were the only foreign patients, were sent off by the last train that left Uskub. I expected that we should be held up by a broken bridge, or that we should all go over one into a ravine; but we came safely to Salonika, where I and the marines were sent on board a hospital ship which had just arrived there for us in the nick of time. A week or two later I was sent home in an empty transport, and went to Haslar Hospital. The doctors there convicted me of some disorder totally different from that of which the doctors in Serbia had accused me. They cured me and let me go, and at the end of November I found myself at Brindisi, on my way back to rejoin the admiral and the mission.

But where were they, and was there any mission left? Since early in November, when Nish had fallen, little news about any one in Serbia had reached the outer world, and none at all about the mission. Terrible things had been happening there behind the veil. It was an army of some two hundred thousand men that had started on the retreat; how many would there be left when they emerged once more into the light of day on the coast of Albania?

I had to wait for a week at Brindisi for news. At last a telegram came from the Admiralty to say that Kerr and the seamen had arrived safe and sound at Podgoritsa in Montenegro, and that they were bound for Scutari. On the same day I heard from a refugee that the admiral had arrived at Scutari with the Serbian General Staff. I lost several more days trying to get a passage, and at last had to beg one in an Italian destroyer

that took me across indeed, but to Durazzo only. It was a nuisance, because Durazzo is a long way south of Medua, and it was at Medua that I hoped to meet the admiral; but it was my only chance of getting over, and it was better than staying where I was.

Durazzo was then in possession of Essad, who favoured Italy and the Allies, but was not yet at war with the Central Powers. There was an Austrian consul still in the town who was a centre of anti-Ally intrigue, and was in communication with the violently anti-Serb and mildly pro-Austrian clans in the northern mountains. There were concealed antagonisms all about, and the possibility of an explosion at any time. Local opinion was not at all hopeful about my chances of getting overland to Medua. The way led through the marshes of the Drin, which are the winter quarters of the Skroeli clan. The Skroeli were afraid of the Serbian army, which was just beginning to arrive through the passes, and excited by the reported advance upon Elbassan of the pursuing Bulgars. At any moment they might become aggressive, and the way would then be closed to all but armed force. The best chance of getting through was to start at once, before things became worse. Horses and a guide were found, and next morning I started off inland across the marshy inlet that makes a peninsula of Durazzo. The marsh was full of wire entanglements that Wilhelm of Wied had made to save himself from his subjects. I had not ridden for an hour when, to my surprise, I saw a British officer riding towards me; I had not known that there was another in Albania. We introduced ourselves, and I learnt that he was Major Parks, D.S.O., formerly of

the Canadian infantry, and now of the Royal Engineers. He was attached to a British Adriatic mission which had been sent to Italy to see what could be done to feed the Serbian army on its arrival at the Adriatic, and he had been sent over to Albania to investigate the possibility of improving the roads by which that part of the army now arriving at Scutari and Alessio must continue its march to Durazzo. He wanted to get up to Alessio, where there was another party of his mission, and to inspect the roads on the way. Since Alessio was on the way to Medua, we could travel together. But he had bad news. He had ridden out to inquire about the state of the countryside, and he had heard that the Skroeli in the marshes of the Drin were "out"; that they had murdered several Serbian wayfarers who had tried to pass by our intended way, and that it was no good trying to get through without a substantial force as escort. Not liking the intelligence, we turned back together to Durazzo to see if we could get some of the Serbs who had newly arrived from Dibra to accompany us on our way.

We took up our quarters in Durazzo at a native inn under the shadow of the palace on the sea-front, once the palace of Wilhelm, but now that of Essad, and we sought for some means of getting through to Alessio. While our interpreter busied himself about negotiations in this matter with Essad, we sat at the window of the inn and contemplated the strange scene presented by the streets of the town. All day and all night they were swarming with a rabble of armed men—Essad's bands in old Turkish uniforms; Serbian soldiers, ever increasing in numbers as the forerunners of the exiled army

began to arrive from Dibra; black-clad refugees of Essad's party from outlying lowland districts; white-clad mountaineers from the north, come to negotiate under safe conduct; the Montenegrin consul's guard, looking like bandits in a Savoy opera; and mingled with all these the ghostly figures of Albanian women, swathed in white or yellow. Sometimes Essad passed along the street surrounded by guards armed to the teeth, and glancing uneasily to left and right out of the corners of his eyes. The air was electric and full of fugitive rumours. Montenegro had collapsed, and the retreat of the Serbian army was cut off at Podgoritsa; the Serbians had won a great victory at Podgoritsa, and had freed Montenegro; the Bulgars had captured Dibra, and were advancing on Durazzo; the Bulgars had halted in the Vardar valley, and were making no attempt to advance; an Italian army was advancing to Durazzo from Valona. This last rumour grew stronger; it grew into definite news that a thousand Italian infantry had arrived within half a day's march to the south. It was true; and presently a company of Italians marched into the town. Here was a force that could keep order, and everybody was much relieved. The imminent danger was past that there would be fighting in the streets between the pro-German anti-Essad element on the one hand and the Serbs and other pro-Ally supporters of Essad on the other. As an outward sign of Essad's sovereign state, a band of half a dozen scarecrow musicians used to play every afternoon in the dusty withered garden between the palace and the sea. That afternoon, after struggling through a familiar Turkish march, they burst into a wild jumble of sounds.

An excited gesticulating crowd gathered round them, and everybody began to run out into the bazaar and to shout. We asked a Serbian soldier what it was all about. "They are playing the *Marseillaise*," he told us. "The Pasha has declared war on Austria, and the Austrian consul and all the Austrians are being interned." A gun went off from a tower of the ruinous town wall up on the ridge above. It was an old field-piece, the artillery of Albania, and it was firing in the direction of an Austrian submarine in the offing. Thus did Albania, under the encouraging influence of one thousand Italians, hurl itself upon the Central Powers.

The declaration of war and the arrival of the Italian soldiers acted as a sedative upon the fevered people of Durazzo. The town was quieter next day, and at the same time we heard of some small parties of Serbian refugees that had come through without molestation from Alessio by the marshes of the Drin. If they could pass, so could we. With much difficulty, and at a great price, we hired horses and guides and started on our way. A young Serbian lieutenant of cavalry joined our party. He had lost his regiment during the retreat, and, having heard that it was at Alessio, was going to join it there. We had in addition our two guides and two troopers of Essad's cavalry to warrant us at his outposts, and Parks had a quantity of tools and material for his engineering works; so we started out, a company of sixteen, including seven cavaliers and nine baggage animals. We were to ride by the Dibra road to Pigsä, half a day's journey, and then to turn north into the hills and to sleep at one of Essad's villages. The second day's journey would take us to Ishmi, Essad's

last village and outpost on the verge of the marshes. The third day we must make a push for it and try to get across the marshes to Alessio. That last day would be a long day, with three rivers to cross, over which there were no bridges ; but we must avoid, if we could, sleeping in the marsh at the villages of the Skroeli. The least that we could expect if we did so would be to have our horses stolen. The party of a Serb to whom we had spoken, which had spent the night at one of those villages, had had to fight hard to defend the out-house in which it had taken refuge against a determined attack by villagers bent on plunder. At Alessio we should find the encampments of the vanguard of the Serbian army, and our difficulties would be over. Thence to the Bay of Medua it was but a few hours' ride.

At early dawn our cavalcade filed through the gate of the town and wended its way down the muddy road. As we passed the walls, a figure, the most heartrending and piteous that eye can ever have seen, staggered up and fell on the threshold of the gate. It needed a second glance to recognize in that poor heap of rags, sodden and begrimed with filth, a Serbian soldier. We had seen many Serbian soldiers in the town, but they were the exceptionally strong or fortunate, who had found some transport to help them and had out-distanced the main body of the retreating army. This that we saw now was the first to arrive at the sea of those who had shared the common lot of the fugitives. When we lifted him from the stones we saw a face that made the blood run cold at the heart. It was hard to distinguish in it the lineaments of humanity. At first one thought that this was the countenance of an old

man, or rather of the mummy of one long dead ; and then there came the dreadful conviction that it was the countenance of a youth—a boy of seventeen or eighteen—but so wasted by hunger and suffering that nothing was left there but dry skin drawn like parchment over projecting bones. The only sign of life in the withered skull was in the large black eyes that looked out at nothing, full of unutterable misery. The lad was all but dead of exhaustion and hunger. He said a word, *hleba* (bread). We gave him a loaf, and he held it in his hand and did not eat. His naked feet were bruised and covered with blood, and he was too feeble to walk farther by himself. Some Serbians from the town passed by and offered to help him on and to take care of him.

During a war it profits little to describe the horrors that attend it. The issue then is not between war and peace ; it is between victory and defeat. Who wills the end wills the necessary means also, and until the end is gained it is better to steel our hearts as well as we can against thoughts and feelings that would tend to make us less firm in our main purpose. To allow ourselves to be shaken in that purpose, when fighting for the right, by thinking overmuch of the misery and loss that are inevitable in its achievement, would be to put a sentiment above a duty. But when the war is over the order of things is surely reversed. It then is sentiment that tempts us to cover up and to forget the horrible things that we have seen, and duty that impels us to record them for the information of others who have not seen them. When the war is over the issue becomes once more that between war and peace, and in deciding that issue people cannot have too clear

a vision of the dark side of war. When the victory is won, for the sake of future generations one must not wholly draw the veil over the miseries and horrors that it cost to win it. Let me try, then, to tell what we saw that morning as we rode along the road to Pigsä. When we had ridden a few miles from the town we saw a crowd walking slowly to meet us. From a distance we recognized the Serbian uniform. "Here comes the vanguard of the army," we said; but when they came closer we wondered what sort of an army this could be. Here was no orderly march of troops; they came straggling by twos and threes. Here was none of the spring and swing of drilled men or of the seemliness of well-kept uniforms; they crawled at a snail's pace, staggering, bent to the ground, supporting themselves on sticks. Many were without caps or boots, and their clothes hung from them in rags and were caked deep in mud and filth; and when we came quite close we saw that looking at us from each of those forlorn figures was the same dreadful face that we had seen when we had raised the lad at the gate of the town—the same parchment skin drawn over projecting bones, the same enormous black eyes with their unseeing stare, the same tragic suggestion that those faces which looked as if they had experienced centuries of suffering should really have been young. A haunting thing was that their faces were all exactly alike—one could not tell one from the other. Starvation had reduced them all to the same mask of pain. "What are they?" we asked the Serbian who accompanied us. He questioned one and told us that they were young recruits of the latest class, lads of from sixteen to eighteen, and that they had been sent

on to Durazzo as unfit for service, while the fit men held the Bulgars back at Elbassan in order to cover the retreat southwards of the army at Scutari and Alessio. We were riding along the road for half the day, and all the time we were passing a continuous stream of these lads, exhausted and hungry, the sick, the dying, and the dead. Those with some resolution left had gathered together to march in groups of a dozen or so. Some of these bands had found a leader, some natural ruler of men with a spirit higher than his fellows, who was keeping them together, encouraging them to go on walking and helping the weaker. Those more feeble and sick staggered on singly or in pairs. Many that were too weak to walk alone were being helped along by friends. For the most part they were sick and dying of sheer hunger, exposure, and fatigue, but there were many also in the last stage of dysentery, and there were some suffering from old wounds and from frostbite. If we left the road to ride amongst the bushes by its side we found here and there a huddled heap upon the ground, the body of some lad too weak to walk farther who had turned aside to die. Two that I saw were dead, and several were past help ; nor had we any real help to give them, and that for us was the most dreadful thing in that dreadful day. When we had distributed what food and money we had—the money to help them when they got to Durazzo—there was little or nothing more that we could do for them. If we found one in the bushes that we hoped might perhaps be still able to struggle on if he were helped, we could call to him the attention of some of the stronger ones and encourage them to look after him. Their exhaustion

had made all but the very strongest so apathetic that of selves they paid no attention to those that had fallen. But several of the fallen were past such help. They were in the stupor of death, and there was nothing that could be done for them but to leave them to die. I saw two boys (and this I set down for those that glorify war) that, too weak either of them to walk alone, were staggering along, each supported against the other. They were bent with the pains of dysentery, and the arm of the younger one had been broken, and having been left untended had set, projecting unnaturally. Every few steps these two stopped and lay down together by the roadside. Looking back at them after we had passed, I saw them stagger aside off the road and fall amongst the bushes. I rode back to them and found them lying side by side. The boy with the broken arm was at the point of death. The other spoke to me ; a few words were all he could manage, and I could not understand them, but I think that he was asking for help for a brother or a friend. There was no help for me to give, and in a few minutes the younger boy died. One could not but be glad for him—the rest of death seemed so kindly a release from unimaginable pain and trouble.

It avails not to dwell further on such scenes. Enough has been written to enable the imaginative to understand the depth and the darkness of the pools of misery and horror that underlie the glory of war. For the unimaginative to understand they must see such things with their own eyes, and they will hardly understand even then. It is lack of imagination that makes war possible—a lack that is the result of the sloth of mind.

that enables us to forget that others are like to ourselves, and that we are all one in our common humanity. I wish that all these could have been with us on the road that day—every stupid and arrogant Prussian militarist that counted the weak below the strong in human rights—every German professor and politician that in his idiotic vanity exalted the rights of his tribe above those of other men. I wish that they could have seen those sights, and then have been driven over the wintry mountains in sickness, hunger, exhaustion, exile, and defeat until they had learned in the only school that could teach it to them the lesson of the brotherhood of man. I wish that every dullard of every nation could have been there who by thinking and talking in his unimaginative sloth of the splendour and nobility of war prepared the way for it and made it possible. Had he been there he would have had thereafter spectres to haunt him, waking and sleeping, that would have made him shudder at the memory of his thoughts and words.

Our only alleviating thought was that these unhappy lads that we were passing were near to the end of their terrible journey. Durazzo and the sea were only half a day's march ahead of them, and there they would at least find rest and shelter and a good supply of food. For many of them we feared that it would come too late. The coarse soldier's food that there was at Durazzo would not avail to save many of them. Only careful nursing could do that, and at Durazzo there was no military hospital nor any arrangements for the sick; but still they could rest there. For a time they would no longer be tortured by having to keep on walking day after day when they had hardly strength to stand.

There was so little that we could do that it was a relief when at last we reached Pigsä, and turning off the road made our way northward by tracks that led us up into the hills. We were now riding along a ridge of rock and red earth as sharp as a knife, with a broad river-valley on our right hand and the mountains beyond. On the terraced sides of the ridge were olive yards, and along its crest groves of those glorious oaks and poplars that are the beauty of Albania. At nightfall we came to a Mohammedan village on the summit of the ridge, and were given quarters in an empty house. One of our troopers was a native of the place, and our reception was friendly.

All next day we followed a track that wound amongst the rocks of the ridge ; it was work for goats. The little country horses that we were riding had no difficulties, but the Serbian officer had a big-boned cavalry charger that was a danger to himself and to everybody else. After slipping and falling several times he had to dismount and to walk the rest of the way. In olden days a paved way had been made along the ridge, but in Albania nothing is ever mended, and least of all a road. The Albanians are wont, they say, to look upon roads not as conveniences but as military threats against their independence. To make a road is an act of war, and to repair one is a crime against society. The pavement of the way had long since fallen into ruin, and the feasible path led alongside of its remains. We passed two or three parties of Serbian refugees and soldiers who were travelling from Alessio to Durazzo. One of them had taken three days to cross the marshes of the Drin. They had lost their way, and had ridden there for hours

in water up to their girths. Another, that included two ladies, had taken a week ; they had been detained for several days on the far side of the Mati river before they could persuade the Albanian ferryman to take them across, and when he did take them they had to pay him ten pounds. Our chance of getting across the marshes in a day seemed small. There were signs of the passing of other parties in the dead horses that lay by the track. The savage villagers in their baggy black trousers and jackets were busy skinning them, looking like carrion crows. Sometimes we passed single Serbian stragglers who had lost their regiments, and were taking advantage of their independence to push on to Durazzo ahead of the main bodies. They were afraid of the Albanians, and hailed our passing with joy as a protection and a sign of civilization in the wilderness, and they looked back at us regretfully after we had passed until the rocks hid us from their sight. After a day's journey, short in time but long when measured by the ache in our bones, we saw the ridge falling away in front of us to a wide and level plain, and coming to the end of the heights we arrived at the village of Ishmi. This was the limit of Essad's territorial power, and there was a large post of his soldiers there to defend the comparatively fertile country of Durazzo against the Maltsors (highlanders), who winter in the marshes beyond. The men of the post in their ragged Turkish uniforms hurried out at the news of our arrival, and although our troopers were of the same service as themselves, gave us a very sullen reception. We were quartered in the upper chamber of a farm, and spent there a disturbed and anxious night. A noisy assembly

of soldiers and villagers was held in the room below us until the small hours, and the people of the house, men, women, and children, took it in turns to come and sit by the hearth in our room and to watch us with a silent and steady stare. I think, however, that they were more frightened and apprehensive than aggressively hostile. Incomprehensible things were happening ; foreigners were going openly about a country where formerly they had seldom desired and even less seldom ventured to travel, and the natives must not be taken unawares.

An hour before dawn we mustered our party on the track by the farm. Let one who has never done it make light of the discomforts of loading a pack-train in the dark of a rainy winter's morning on a greasy road in an unfriendly village ! The officer of Essad's band was rendered thoroughly suspicious by our early flitting. He hung about and forbade us to do this and that—to load the horses, to pay the master of the house, or to take the guides from Durazzo with us ; but nobody marked him, and he made no effort to enforce his orders. Our guides and troopers were out of heart about the coming journey into the Maltsors' country. The bulky loads of Parks' picks and shovels slipped and turned on the wet backs of the horses, and the horses were so small in comparison with their loads that several times when a couple of men gave a load a heave they upset horse and all into a prostrate heap.

Dawn was breaking when we began to file down the hillside into the plain. Near us on the left was the sea, far away on the right were the misty mountains, and all the space in front was a shadowy level that was clothed

with a dense growth of forest, coppice, and the vegetation of the marsh. Silver streaks and patches of water gleamed here and there amongst the gloom of the flats, and the wind that was sighing and rustling across them made waves of shadow flow amongst the tops of the trees. It was a dismal view, and the marshes seemed to smell of death and decay. We rode through the blackened ruins of a village that had been burned in a recent foray, and passing across some sedgy fields came soon to our first river—a river without any name that I ever heard. It was a sluggish and a turbid stream, thirty yards wide, that flowed between high and steep banks of mud. Although this was the shortest way between the chief towns of northern Albania, Durazzo, Alessio and Scutari, there was not so much as the trace of a landing-stage, and the only ferry-boat was the dug-out trunk of a tree. That was all that Albanian civilization had achieved in many thousand years. Romantic the Albanians may be in the eyes of holiday-making travellers who are tired of Western ways, but they are not very practical. They have lived longer in their country and made less of it than any other race in Europe. It is curious that when an Albanian goes abroad he should so often be successful in the world. At home his most marked characteristics are stupidity, ferocity and sloth, and the three together have so retarded Albania that the country seems to be passing only now out of its primitive period, and to be beginning its middle age.

The dug-out would take only two horses at a time. The unfortunate animals had to be unloaded, and to be induced to drop themselves down the mud bank on to a sloping shelf of slime at its base. With a lot of shoving

and slapping and shouting they were then prevailed upon to transfer themselves to the dug-out a leg at a time. Some were clever about it, and did the gymnastics needed to get on board with much agility—probably they were old hands at the game. Some jibbed for hours it seemed, and had practically to be lifted on board. Some foolish ones went at it with a rush, and floundering right across the dug-out wound up in the river beyond. They could swim across well enough, but they got stuck in the soft mud of the landing on the other side, and had to be hauled out with ropes. What with the crossing and the unloading and loading it took us two hours before we were ready to start on. Leaving the nameless river behind us, we now entered into the heart of the wilderness. This sea-plain about the mouths of the Mati and the Drin is formed of accumulations of silt and gravel that have been washed down from the mountains, and of old beaches that have been washed up by the receding sea. It is saturated with water, that stands in pools and trickles in rivulets through the stones, and it is densely clothed with thickets of birch and alder, above which rise a few sickly forest trees. For long hours we threaded our way amongst the swamps, riding along old beaches green with grass that were raised a little above the surrounding level. Layers of vapour hung low over the marsh, and there was nothing to see all round but the sodden foliage of the alders and the stems of the birches shining like white spectres through the mist. Large trees that had died of the miasma of the place stretched out their naked boughs above our heads in a gesture frozen by death. The only living things to be seen were the ravens that

sat and croaked in their topmost branches. In the whole world there can be no more dismal and gloomy place. Everything is dying and rotting, dank with foul and stagnant water, and pestilential with the heavy breath of fever and decay. If there be any way down from the light of day into that place where there is "no light but rather darkness visible," it is here that one would seek it. Splashing down an alley in the thicket where the boughs of the alders met overhead and shut out the light of day, we passed a tall figure swathed in white that stood like a ghost in the obscurity, and in a clearing a little farther on we came upon a settlement of the Skroeli. The first sign of it was a palisade of wicker-work. At every few yards' distance along the palisade an upright pole was fixed, and on the top of each pole there was set the gleaming white skull of a horse. The skulls grinned out into the dark of the thicket a savage and a ghastly welcome. Within the palisade there was a cluster of miserable huts made of wicker on timber frames, and standing on piles to raise them above the water. The impenetrable and lightless thicket clustered close round about, and everything was stained by age, damp and mould to the deepest black. As the splashing of our horses' hoofs announced our passing, a knot of Skroeli braves appeared at the gate of the palisade, immensely tall thin men with high stooping shoulders, and swathed from head to foot in white. Their wrappings, which were bound under their jaws and carried up over their heads, left exposed their dark haggard faces only, with long thin jaws, high cheekbones, eagle noses, and great burning eyes. They stared at us silently and motionlessly, and slunk away with a

curious stooping high-stepping gait, the gait of the mountaineer. Our guides led us out into more open rides, and presently the thickets ceased, and we came to the Mati river, a shallow, rapid stream some three hundred yards wide that runs rapidly amongst banks of gravel. Again the only ferry-boat was the dug-out trunk of a tree, but the shallowness of the stream made it easier to get the horses embarked and disembarked, and we got across in half the time that we had taken at the nameless river. On the far side of the Mati we plunged into the thicket again, and the water of the swamp began to get deeper. All through the afternoon we waded along with the water up to our saddles, threading our way amongst gnarled trees and little round meres fringed with withered rushes. It was a wonder that the guides were able to keep the way; they wound about, turning and twisting hither and thither, and warning us that a step aside would bog our horses in mud so deep that it would be impossible to pull them out. Many horses had been lost in that way, they said.

Across the tops of the trees we could now see far away ahead of us a conical hill standing out from the mountains and crowned with the sharp outlines of walls and towers. It was the old castle of Alessio; but night was coming on and it was still doubtful whether we could get out of the marsh before it was dark. As soon as the light failed it would be impossible to move; our guides would not be able to find their way through the water, and if we tried to proceed we should inevitably founder in the bog. Rather than risk that we must halt at the last bit of dry ground that we reached with

daylight and spend the December night there. It was at this point that the guides began to linger and to hold long discussions amongst themselves, and at last confessed that they had wholly lost their way. We waded cautiously to a sedgy island and resigned ourselves to a wet and freezing night. But after a little while there was a splashing amongst the trees and the white figure of a Maltsor appeared riding by. At our hail he made first of all as if to flee, and then to unsling his rifle; but our troopers persuaded him of their peaceable intentions on this occasion, and when we added that there would be a *mejidieh* for a guide on the way to Alessio he became less hostile. He was going that way and would lead us. We set off again, following him in single file. It was twilight, but his white figure was just visible riding on ahead. He was still uncertain about us, and as he rode he kept his head ever turned over his shoulder, fixing us with a steady stare and watching for any sign of the hostile movement of a hand towards a rifle butt. In an hour or so he led us out of the swamps and placed us on a firm and well-marked track that would take us to Alessio. By this time it was quite dark; but we had to guide us a soft glow that shone in the sky above the town. It was the light of the camp fires of the Serbian army reflected from the clouds. Presently the dark ahead was pricked with a multitude of points of light, and soon we were riding amongst the bivouacked regiments. On either side of the road the sides of the hills to right and left twinkled with countless fires, and against their red and leaping flames we could see the black outlines of circles of seated men with the light shining on their faces and on their hands outstretched to the

blaze. It was a whole gallery of pictures painted by Rembrandt. Towards midnight we clattered over the stones into the tumble-down town. Every house shed and booth was full to the threshold with sleeping Serbian soldiers lying in closely packed rows wherever there was a roof to cover them. It was not until the small hours that we had news from a passer-by of some other English to be found in a deserted monastery on a hill across the river. We climbed the hill amongst more fires, burning low now into mere heaps of red embers, and after knocking at the great gate of the monastery, we were admitted to a hospitable welcome by a party of officers of the British Adriatic mission who had halted here on their way to Scutari. We sat and fed and drank in a circle round the vast table in the refectory, and went to sleep packed shoulder to shoulder in the straw.

On the next day at dawn I said good-bye to Parks, who was already busily negotiating for the soldiers who were to go back into the marshes with him and to help him to make his ferries. With a single baggage horse I rode off round a spur of mountain and along a road that, leading all the way through camps and bivouacs, brought me in a couple of hours down to the sea and so to San Giovanni di Medua. As I rode round the bay there was a droning overhead and a loud sound of explosions. A party of excited horsemen came galloping past, shouting out about a great air raid from Cattaro; but when I came in sight of the two or three ruinous white houses that make up Medua there was no visible damage. The first thing I saw was Petty Officer Needham, the admiral's coxswain, pulling about in the bay

and picking up the fish that had been killed by the bombs.

A tiny cove, a semicircle of sandy beach, a white house or two, bare and ruinous, and brown hills rising from the sea—this was Medua as I saw it on that December day, a very bleak and inhospitable spot to be the desired haven of the remnants of an army and a people. There are more and stonier stones there than in any other stony place, and the north wind blows harder, longer, and colder than anywhere else in the world. There is anchorage for only one small ship at a time, and for port facilities there were then a ruinous wooden jetty, two little old steamboats, a handful of tiny sailing-vessels, and clumps of wreckage sticking up out of the sea all about the haven, the result of a visit from the Austrian destroyers at Cattaro. Yet this was the only refuge for the fugitive Serbian nation, the place to which they had been looking eagerly forward through the months of the terrible retreat that began on the Danube over three hundred miles away.

Pushing my way through crowds of Serbian soldiers and civilian refugees, through Montenegrins, Albanians, and long lines of pack-horses and oxen that filled to overflowing the narrow strand between the hillside and the sea, I came to the chief building—a tumble-down Turkish custom-house—where I found the admiral and Kerr installed in great discomfort. The seamen were quartered under canvas on a sand-flat under the hill a short distance away. Our officers' mess was in another Turkish ruin by the sea, and as we sat there that night over our biscuit and bully I heard the

story of the adventures of the mission since I parted from it two months before at Chupria. The marines, as I have mentioned, were sent on ahead under Elliot, and, having made their way out by Monastir, they were now at Malta. The admiral had been with the Serbian General Staff during the first part of the retreat, but later he had gone on ahead with a few retainers and had come through the Albanian mountains from Prizrend to Scutari by the Ljum Kola route—a terrible journey in midwinter. Kerr had followed behind with the 4.7-inch guns and their crews, fighting in the rearguard of the Serbian army. The story of his great anabasis of four hundred miles to the sea, fighting and starving, is one of the finest stories of the war. One may hope that some day it will be told by one who took part in the adventure.

While the exiled army was resting and reviving at Scutari and Alessio, Medua was a busy port and crowded with men, animals, and goods. Seldom can a big operation of transport and supply have been carried out under more peculiar or more difficult conditions. Only one small ship at a time could get near to the end of the tumble-down jetty, and the old Turkish buildings, which were all that there was in the way of a warehouse, could hold not a tithe of the goods that had to be landed and cleared inland. The place was within reach of a morning stroll for the enemy's submarines and aeroplanes from Cattaro. From the hill above one could often see the conning tower of an enemy submarine, black on the waves against the western sun. They strolled about outside the harbour as it were with their hands in their pockets.

Wind, stones, and bombs remain the chief memory of Medua during those weeks.

“Blow, blow, thou winter wind !
Thou art not so unkind
As nitrotoluene,”

sang our poet as he dodged the aeroplanes in a gale on the hillside. The stony hills rose in a straight funnel from the beach, with not so much cover on them as would shelter a mouse from the wind or the bombs. Where the hill fell most steeply to the sands the civil refugees had pitched their camps and made themselves lairs amongst the rocks and in the sand and scrub. They built themselves screens of boughs and stretched what clothes they had over sticks to make booths ; and at dusk their fires twinkled in hundreds all about the hillside. When the weather was fine they sat round their fires in the dark and sang—a circle of illuminated faces ; but when the Bora came—the gale that blows from the snowfields of the North with its rain and squalls, and lashes the sea into a mist of spray—they were then in a most miserable plight, and mortality amongst the old people and children was high. There were two Serbian doctors who worked as hard as men could ; but the only medical supplies that they had were a few cases of comforts from the chemists' shops in Brindisi that had been sent to us as a present by the English ships there. Fortunately there were not many fresh wounded, and casualties from the air raids were comparatively few. No single raid did as much execution as a Serbian soldier, who thought that the base of an unexploded shell from an Austrian destroyer would

make a convenient anvil on which to cut a wire with a pickaxe. Nor was there much epidemic disease. How we escaped it, if one considers the sanitary conditions of camps of exhausted soldiers and refugees, situated on rocks and sand and lacking every civilized appliance, it is hard to say. Some good work in regulation and disinfection was done by the Serbian doctors, and it was to that, no doubt, and to the cold weather that we owed our immunity. But dysentery was ravaging the troops after the hardships of their marches, and many were so exhausted and starved that our food came too late to save them. They died of inanition, exposure, and fatigue, in the sight of the supplies that would have meant life to men who were not wholly broken. In most pitiable case of all were some thousand small schoolboys, from ten to fifteen years of age, who had made the great retreat under the charge of their masters and were camped in makeshift tents and booths amongst the sandhills. The masters did their best for them, and it is no blame to any one but the Germans that the poor little chaps were wasted with bad food, grimed with dirt, covered with vermin, and clothed only in rags, and that many of them were sick with dysentery or mere exhaustion. Under the circumstances it could not have been otherwise. They lay about on the rocks and amongst the dunes, too spent to take interest in anything, busy only in tying up their rags and in the unending pursuit and slow devouring of fragments of rough food. It was perhaps the most satisfactory thing that happened at Medua that on our very last day there the admiral succeeded in getting all of them away to Brindisi, the elder on the last of the foodships, and the mere children on a hospital ship.

Work at Medua was war in its simplest and crudest form, and stripped of the trimmings of civilization. When we awoke in the morning we recorded daily our relief that we had not been lifted out of our beds before daylight by the arrival of a 6-inch shell from the *Novara*, the Austrian light cruiser at Cattaro. There was no reason at all why she should not have come at any time and shelled the place to bits, and it is a mystery why she did not. One day we had a series of messages from the Italian wireless station to the north to say, "*Novara* seventeen miles distant, making for Medua"; "*Novara* twelve miles distant, making for Medua"; "*Novara* nine miles distant, making for Medua," and then we transferred our belongings into a *cache* on the hillside, and went to a lookout place on the ridge to watch, not without emotion, a column of smoke on the horizon. The smoke grew nearer and nearer; but there came the noise of gunfire from below the horizon line, and the smoke dwindled and vanished. We learned afterwards that the *Novara* had been intercepted and chased home by the British light cruisers from Brindisi. While the gunfire was going on we had to sit idly ashore there on the rocks, guessing that British ships were in action out at sea, and feeling like sparrows in a cage.

Our busiest days were those on which a foodship arrived from Brindisi. The day before its arrival lists were prepared of the refugees who had been selected to go back on the boat—members of the Serbian Government, it might be, the *corps diplomatique* from Scutari, foreign missions, military and civil, staff officers, sick officers and men, deputies, special envoys, and refugees in general. Early in the morning the fortunate people

who are to be allowed to go collect at the end of the beach where the jetties are, and camp there for the day on their baggage. A line of soldiers is drawn across the beach lower down in order to keep back the rest. A rumour and a stir goes through the crowd. The steamer has been reported, and presently a little black tramp appears outside and crawls warily round the point, treading delicately through mine-fields, known and unknown, Italian and Austrian. There is a sigh of relief when she has picked her way through the wrecks that crowd the harbour and casts anchor off the end of the jetty. The wrecks look ugly, but they serve a purpose as a shield against submarines' torpedoes and as a confusion to destroyers' guns. Away over there on the far beach lies an unexploded torpedo shining on the sand as a reminder that such a shield may have its uses. It came out of the blue one day and jumped ashore like a shark that has lost its way.

Because of the aeroplanes there is no time to lose. The ship has hardly come to rest before she is surrounded by little sailing craft, squat, half-decked boats that in time of peace ply between Medua and the Boyana river, and pass up to Scutari. Their occupation is gone now because of the Austrian submarines. One did try to get round to the Boyana a few days ago, but it was captured and sunk by a submarine so close to our point that an Italian soldier hidden in the rocks succeeded in hitting one of the submarine's crew with a rifle. They make good lighters enough, and at any rate they are all that there are. Crew and soldiers work like steam-engines, with one eye upon a certain flagstaff that stands by the ruined house where the admiral

lives. Soon the boats are returning to the jetty, and lines of soldiers are running up and down like ants, building stacks of boxes, good English biscuit and French *pain de guerre*, piles of tins of bully beef and heaps of sacks of flour. At one end of the ship men are tumbling bales of compressed fodder into the sea; these float ashore in time, and the horses and oxen seem to like the stuff all the better for the salt. On board the larder of the *Maestro di Casa* is besieged by the licensed brigands of the various officers' messes ashore who are in search of eatables and drinkables to relieve the monotony of bully beef and soldiers' bread and to check incipient scurvy. One goes off in triumph with a string of tomatoes, another gets a puncheon of wine, or a bottle of oil, or a tin of jam, or precious potatoes doled out by the *kilo*. The *Maestro* explains that he cannot bring more; in view of mines and torpedoes it is too risky an investment for capital. All the while batches of starved ponies and trains of ox-carts are drifting up through the crowd on the beach and drifting off again laden with sacks and boxes. They take their burdens a mile or two along the Alessio road and drop them in a series of *caches* there in which they are less conspicuous to aeroplanes. The ox-carts with enormous wheels five feet in diameter are Montenegrin. Serbian carts ought to have four wheels, but those here have only two; they all had to be cut in half in order to get them over the Albanian passes. For the most part the horses are in miserable plight, and the road is strewn with them dead and dying. The oxen look at least in better case. They have this good quality, that they spare one's feelings by seeming in quite good condition until

they are utterly spent, and then they lie down and die without warning. But a spent horse is a heartrending sight, or would be but for sights more heartrending still.

Above the crowd on the beach the admiral is pacing his "quarter-deck," which is a little stone terrace that the Serbs have built for him by his warehouse. The dark, powerfully built officer talking to him is Colonel Neditch, commandant of the local military forces, whose strong hand maintains the real order that underlies the apparent confusion of the beach. They are beset by all sorts of men, but chiefly by refugees begging for a passage. Unfortunately a ship will not hold more than it can, and all the comfort that can be given to most of them is the advice to make the best of their way to Durazzo while food holds out and before the Austrians come. Women and children can perhaps be sent away by sea, but men must face the marshes and mountains of the journey south. The poor folk turn gloomily away. A weedy youth comes with a written petition which I copy here *literatim* :—

" To His Exelency,

" Admiral of St. John Harbour.

" 26.12.1915.

Personally.

" HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND MERRY NEW YEAR !

" YOUR EXELENCY,—It is six days since I arrived here ; it is six days of terrible starvation ; and six days of sorrowful endurance.

" As American student I come to Serbia two years ago, and now having been pushed in this dead corner in this harbour I pray to Our Lord to save my life.

" I, and a few of my commrads students, beg your Exelency, as noble Englishman, and appeal to your kindness to save us, to save our yong lifes.

" Highly prizing your kindness,

" I remain,

" Very respectfully yours,

"

" Novelist."

A pathetic appeal ! The sorrowfully enduring novelist wants of course a passage out of this dead corner, but inquiry shows that he and his comrades have some money and as much food as anybody else. They are better able to face the tramp to Durazzo than many others, and for them there is no passage.

A band of Bulgar prisoners is working near by, swarthy Mongolian fellows in the Russian uniform which is now the visible sign of their nation's great treason. Some are sprinkling lime-water as a disinfectant. Some are scraping bacon that has been washed ashore from the wrecks ; under the coating of green scum it is still quite eatable, at least by men who would otherwise have nothing with which to help down their dry bread. Some are carrying stores. One lets a box fall ; it breaks and some biscuits tumble out, and prisoners and soldiers crowd together round the booty and snatch up the broken bits until a *narednik* runs up and cuffs them off. It seems a pity that they should not be allowed such gleanings, but discipline is discipline even at Medua.

It is midday and the ship is half empty, but it is destined to be a day of alarms. Men in sight of the

flagstaff suddenly drop their loads and run ; a red flag (a seaman's bandana handkerchief in private life) has gone fluttering up to the top of it. A hoarse bugle blows a series of staccato notes. Now everybody is running and calling "*Aeroplani.*" In a minute, but for the piles of stores and baggage, the beach is empty, and a ripple of brown humanity is flowing up the steep hillside. The boats are pushing off in urgent haste from alongside of the ship and are scattering out into the harbour. We shall have only three minutes' law after the signal, and there is no time to waste in the scramble up and away from the more dangerous zone. It is bad going through the thorn bushes, and in spite of the efforts of our newly appointed sanitary authority the hillside is filthy. We have got a few hundred feet only above the houses when "Tock ! tock ! tock ! tock !" begins from a higher ridge upon the right ; that is a battery of machine guns that lives up there to greet the air-raiders. From the left, and nearer the sea, comes a "Boch ! whew !" — that is a battery of aged field guns that are having long shots before the aeroplanes get out of reach overhead. We are nearly at the top of the lower ridge above the beach when we hear a humming in the air and a plane sails into sight over the crest, low down and coming straight for us. We know it well by sight : it is one of the Austrian bombers. There are little cotton-woolly puffs of shrapnel smoke being born all round about it in the sky, but none of them are near enough to trouble it. Now we are at the top of the ridge, and we see two other bombers closely following the first. We consider the course that number one is setting with some solicitude, and try to persuade our-

selves that he is not coming right overhead ; but he is. A rabbit-like dash to one side only makes the matter worse. In a second or two he will be over us. Our machine guns are now firing over our heads, so it is a good plan to lie down behind a rock ; a short or spent bullet will be no more welcome as a guest because it is fired by an ally. Now the brute is straight overhead, and inwardly one adjures him, " Hold on, Willy ! Don't drop it yet ! " and then, " Go on ! Go on ! " He goes on, but a second afterwards he seems to have made up his mind that this bit of the ridge looks a likely place for a gun emplacement. There is a noise as if a bit of canvas had been ripped from the zenith to the earth, an ear-cracking grunt, the smack of a Titan's whip, and a black cloud of smoke and dust jumps up amongst the rocks. Big bees go buzzing about, and the rocks all round seem to be crackling a little. But it is the ship that they are really after. The three raiders form up into a tail and circle over it in turn. There is crack after crack, and black volcanoes spring from the water and hide the ship in a fog of fumes and spray. The last thing visible there is men diving over the side. The machine guns are keeping up their spasmodic stammer, and the field guns are coughing. Fifteen bombs have been dropped round the ship, and a few on the beach that are meant for the houses and piles of stores. With the fifteenth bomb the performance is over, and the aeroplanes wheel out to sea and drone away to the north. It seems impossible that there should be anything left of the ship, but as the fog clears there she lies as before. Nothing has hit her. The buildings and stores have escaped also. But the raid

was not wholly without effect : three Serbian soldiers are lying dead upon the sands.

The red flag is run down, the bugle blows a reassuring blast, and slowly the beach fills up again with its swarming crowd of men and beasts. The attack was sure to come, and it is a relief to get it over. By the afternoon the ship is cleared of its cargo, and the embarkation of refugees begins. When the rejected see the more fortunate beginning to go on board they become almost uncontrollable ; they attack the restraining line of soldiers, and swarming round by the rocks behind drop on to the beach by unexpected paths. There are no barriers, and as darkness falls it is impossible to keep the beach clear. The sands and the jetty become jammed with a mass of clamorous humanity. Those chosen must take their chance ; unless they were prudent enough to get close up to the jetty early in the day they are likely to lose their passage. Our one little steamboat puffs, overladen, to and from the ship. An officer at the end of the jetty struggles to keep himself from being shoved into the water while he calls out in bad French or rudimentary Serbian for the folk who ought to be embarking, "*Messieurs les Ministres*," or "*Messieurs les Députés*," or "*Messieurs les Officiers malades*." At each journey unauthorized men have to be forcibly restrained from getting into the boat, and a way has to be cleft through the press for some authorized person who has been crowded out. Unauthorized rowing-boats, heavy with refugees, spring up from nowhere out of the dark and try to rush the gangways. Sometimes they succeed, but more often they fail, and some particularly unauthorized and obstreperous gang of

boarders gets itself thrown into the water. As the night wears on and the ship fills up, men and women whose hopes are vanishing begin to weep and pray, and a continuous clamour of shouting and beseeching goes up from the whole beach. At last the ship has its full burden, and there is nothing left for the authorities to do but to take refuge in the house and to bar the doors. But for hours yet the boats row vainly round the ship and the turmoil of voices continues along the shore. Amidst the general hubbub one can distinguish over and over again the words of entreaty, "*Molim vas, Gospodine! molim vas!*" At midnight a searchlight flashes on to the haven from out in the bay; an Italian destroyer of the escort has dashed in and is giving the signal for departure. The ship weighs and creeps off through the mine-fields, and silence falls on those left behind as they return to their lairs amongst the rocks.

During those days we sent off by ship from Medua most of the dignitaries and authorities of the Serbian nation. As the Austrian menace from the north grew more imminent, and the time for escape grew shorter, they came ever thicker and faster. One night we had a polyglot banquet in our ruinous mess of all the Allied Ministers, and next day we sent them off on a tramp steamer. A few days later, on waking in the morning, we found several hundred black-coated members of the Serbian *Skupština* (parliament) encamped on the beach amongst their baggage. They had to wait there for several days, poor folk, before a ship came for them. I thought how much the members of Parliament in London, if they could have been there too, would have valued so interesting and practical an experience of

the incidents of war ; but then I remembered all the brilliant naval and military uniforms that I had seen around me when, a few weeks before, I had sat for a day on the benches at Westminster, and I reflected that it would never have done for them to be sleeping on the beach at Medua amongst the tattered black coats of the members of the Serbian *Skupshtina*.

Sometimes there were arrivals from the opposite direction, coming by sea from Brindisi. One day the tramp steamer brought us a magnificent French general and his staff. He had come to study the question of the evacuation of the Serbian army. That was a question that for a long time we had been studying with some anxiety ourselves. The problem was how to embark 150,000 men with guns and beasts from the open beach of a bay where only one ship could lie at a time, and that a small one, and not within half a mile of the shore ; where there were no lighters or tugs, and of rowing-boats only two or three ; and where the submarines were always prowling and the aeroplanes buzzing, and there was nothing with which to drive them away. No solution of the problem had occurred to us ; indeed the admiral had decided that it was insoluble, and that the only advice that any seaman could give to the Serbian army was to push on to Durazzo while there was yet time. So we were much interested to see what would be the result of the general's studies. He spent the evening consulting with his staff about the resources of the port, and next day they all rode off inland to Scutari. As he left us he asked us to recommend to him a good hotel on the outskirts of Scutari where he could stop and don *grand tenue* for his formal entry into the city.

We did not know of any hotel that would suit the purpose, but there was a khan half-way at Babaloushi which had a little bit of roof left.

We had not long to wait for the result of the general's studies. Two days later an orderly arrived with an enormous package which contained his scheme for the embarkation of the Serbian army at Medua. The embarkation would begin at dawn two days later, when so many regiments with so many guns, cattle, and oxen would be embarked. It would proceed at the rate of so many men per hour until sunset, and on the next day such and such other regiments and batteries would be embarked, and so on, day by day, until the whole army had gone. The scheme gave every possible particular except one. Nothing was said about what the men, guns, horses, and cattle were to be embarked in. Full provision, however, must undoubtedly have been made for that. It was magnificent. A fleet of transports would come with tugs, lighters, and cranes for the embarkation ; no doubt there would be a lot of engineers also with materials for the erection of improvised jetties. The Allied fleet would come up from the Mediterranean in order to keep off the Austrian fleet from Cattaro and the submarines and the aeroplanes, and the Serbian army would be off before we could say Jack Robinson. We were only sorry for those who had already undertaken, needlessly, as it seemed, the fatigues of the long marches to Durazzo. But it was odd that no particulars should have been given to us about the naval arrangements. It chanced that I was to go up to Scutari just then in order to speed upon their way a couple of sick seamen who had been left behind in hospital there, and I was

told to find out at the same time all that I could about the coming of the fleets, the transports, the lighters, the cranes, and all the rest.

I rode the thirty miles up the valley to Scutari, and since I had a foundered horse the journey took fourteen hours. All the way there were camps of the tired army, and the country looked as if a swarm of giant locusts had passed over it. Every tree and bush had been stripped of its branches for their camp fires, and every green thing had been devoured. The native villages had been burnt in the recent wars between Essad and the Maltsors, and were blackened ruins. The way was strewn with dead and dying horses left by the Serbian retreat. In some marshy places the carcasses lay so thick that the ground seemed to be made of them. Again, as on the road from Durazzo, there were sick and dying men dragging themselves towards the sea, and by the side of the way there were many newly-dug graves. At Scutari I was taken to see Colonel Pavlovitch, the chief of the Serbian General Staff. I spoke of the orders that had been received for the embarkation of the army, and hinted at the admiral's natural curiosity to know something about the arrangements that had been made for the fleets, transports, lighters, cranes, and so on, that were needed for the operation.

"These are naval matters," said the chief of the staff, "and we wish the admiral to have full and unfettered power to deal with them. Perhaps he will be so good as to make whatever technical arrangements he considers necessary."

I suggested that great as were the powers and capacities of a British admiral, they did not extend to order-

ing the movements of the Allied fleets; to conjuring a fleet of transports out of the two old tramps from Brindisi that were all the ships that we ever saw at Medua, or to converting a shallow and open roadstead and a shingle beach into a port suitable for the embarkation of an army. I do not think that the chief of the staff was very much surprised or disappointed by what I said. He readily agreed that the matter might require more particular examination.

“Probably we shall have to go to Durazzo or Valona,” he said, and I guessed from his tone that he had not had much confidence in the studies of the French general.

So the whole scheme turned out to have been little better than a joke. But it was not a very good joke, since it delayed the army with a false hope when it was of first importance that it should lose no time in preparing for the farther march to Durazzo and Valona. The longer that it tarried at Scutari and Alessio the more hurried must be its movements when the Austrians advanced, and the more it must suffer on the last stage of its journey.

Returning to Medua with the news that we were not likely to see the Allied fleets off Medua after all, I found that our mess had received an addition during my absence. Fitch, the admiral’s secretary, and Petty Officer Grimstead, my shipmate of Smederevo days, had arrived from Malta, but they had arrived by the skin of their teeth only. The tramp that was bringing them hit an Austrian mine a couple of miles out, and went down in ten minutes. Over a hundred lives were lost with the ship, mostly those of Montenegrin volunteers returning from the United States. Fitch and Grim-

stead spent half an hour in the water before they were picked up by a boat from a following ship, and they arrived at Medua with nothing but their trousers and shirts.

For another month we stayed at Medua, landing food and speeding it on its way up country to feed the starving army, and shipping Serbian notabilities and refugees over to Italy. In the meanwhile the army began slowly—all too slowly as it seemed at the time—to make its way from Scutari to Alessio, and from Alessio to Durazzo. It became ever more clear that the situation was an explosive one. In the north the Austrians were pressing the Montenegrins; the rumbling of the guns bombarding Mount Lovtchen was faintly audible at Medua. Bulgarian bands were coming through the Albanian highlands in the east and stirring up trouble amongst the Maltsors as they came. What would happen next nobody could tell; they could tell only that something certainly would happen soon. What did happen was that the Montenegrin resistance, such as it was, suddenly collapsed. There was then nothing between the still disorganized Serbian army and the Austrians, and the delayed retreat to Durazzo had to be pushed on post-haste. In a day or two the Austrians were on the Boyana river, which was barely twenty-four hours' march to the north; another day, and Bulgarian bands were coming out of the hills and firing on the road between Scutari and Alessio at Babaloushi; Northern Albania was lost, and Medua had to be evacuated.

On the night of January 20th (1916) we made our escape to Brindisi, together with the *corps diplomatique*

from Cettigne, on an Italian destroyer that had been sent to escort the last two food-ships of the Allies that came to Medua. At midnight the convoy was ready to start. The two tramps were crowded to the gunwale with the last of the refugees, and the deck of the destroyer was strewn with the huddled forms of diplomats and officers trying to keep out of the cold. By the fitful light of the camp fires we could see our familiar beach still piled with stores, which we hoped that the Serbians would eat, and not the Austrians. Against the fires a battery of field guns could be seen which it had proved impossible to embark. There was a brilliant moon. The propeller of our destroyer was just beginning to turn when the air became full of a rattling buzz. "The skipper of the tramp has been wasting coal," said one beside me; but it was not the tramp blowing off steam. A moment afterwards three big bombs fell with terrific whacks within a hundred yards of our star-board quarter. The flashes and black eruptions made the moonlit water look like a lake in hell. With great enterprise an Austrian aeroplane had taken advantage of the moonlight to fly over and to give us a parting salute. The destroyer's anti-aircraft gun waved to and fro, but the human owl was invisible against the dark of the sky. Some more bombs fell on the beach. One raised a great shower of sparks; perhaps it had hit a pile of biscuit boxes; perhaps at last they had planted one on the "quarter-deck." The tramps were now getting past the mine-fields, and our destroyer dashed off after them. There was good reason to believe that a submarine was waiting outside, so we were no sooner past the mines than the destroyer sprang ahead at thirty

knots or more, swinging round and round the tramps in gigantic spirals and figures of eight like a mad greyhound gambolling about a pair of decayed jackasses. Out behind us our roaring white wake was thrown in loops about the surface of the sea. An hour or two, during which nerves were at high tension, brought us through the dangerous area, and the convoy settled down into a more orderly procession to make its slow way to Brindisi.

Looking back from a great distance, we could see quick scintillations of light in the night sky over Medua. It was the Serbian field guns saluting some returning aeroplane with shrapnel fire; and that was our last sight of a place which held for a time more misery and grief, more fortitude and endurance, than so small a place can ever have held before.

CHAPTER III.

HARWICH—H.M.S. CENTAUR.

WE came back to London, and for six weeks or so the Admiralty kept us all unemployed, in the idea that it might reconstitute the mission, and send it back to join the Serbs when they got to Salonika. For two weeks of these six it was enough for content only to be in London again and to look at it and to find it the same as ever. Here was Trafalgar Square, and the lions too. Fancy Trafalgar Square being here still, after what had happened on the Danube! Here were the buses, not so many as before the war, but still plenty. Let us take one to the Bank and see if the City also is still there. It is; and there is old Mr. Blank, the bill-broker, making his daily journey to the Bank in his spectacles as if nothing had happened.

For another week or two it was enough to have plenty of interesting things to do. At Medua, when one was tired of keeping warm over the oil-lamp, one could go and keep warm by walking about among the rocks, and when the sight of the houseless soldiers and refugees there became too much for the spirits one could go back to the oil-lamp; but here in London there was one interesting thing after another, plenty of newspapers, plenty to eat, plenty of people to meet in

the street, and plenty of pictures to see for the trouble of turning in through a door. If the worst came to the worst, one could go to the House of Commons and listen to the ginger groups and to the pacificists helping the Government to win the war. But the interest of these wonders did not last very long, and when it waned London became a dreadful place. The reality of the times was elsewhere, and it was a blessing when the Admiralty at last decided to wind up our mission and to set us free for some new employment. For the junior naval officer the Admiralty means that room on the ground floor which is the office of the naval assistant to the Second Sea Lord, and whither he goes to learn what his next employment is going to be. Here sit two ogres, a captain and a commander, all day long devouring junior naval officers and their hopes. One with a taste for sunny seas enters their den and leaves it bound for the Arctic. Another who is courting at Portsmouth comes out from the den with orders for China. Here, waiting in the dismal corridor, you may see poor Black, who lost his ship, and has just been told for the tenth time that there is nothing for him at present ; or Grey, who has done fairly well in destroyers, and is furious at being sent as a watchkeeper to H.M.S. *Immovable* ; or White, that popular and successful officer, who is thinking it over whether it is worth his while to go in command to H.M.S. *Novelty*, the first of her interesting class.

Making my way one day into the ogre's den, I found that I was in luck. A new light cruiser would be commissioning on the Tyne in six weeks' time. She was to replace the *Arethusa*, Commodore Tyrwhitt's flagship at Harwich, which had lately been sunk by a mine off

Felixstowe. Would I like to join her? Would I like to sail with that Rupert of the high seas? I would indeed. In order to employ the interval until the new ship was ready I might go to Whale Island for a course of instruction in gunnery, and then join another light cruiser at Harwich for a bit, to see how things were done there.

Whale Island is the home of naval gunnery. The officers and the gunnery ratings of the Navy all go there at some time in their lives to receive a training in guns. The island is a low, green flat that has been reclaimed from the waters of Portsmouth harbour, and it is covered now with neat red-brick barracks, long sheds or "batteries" for the guns, and all sorts of towers, dummy turrets, ranges, and trial-butts. There are brass cannon that wink in the sun, and everything is swept, scoured, cleaned, and polished until it makes the eyes ache. For recreation there is a large lawn, where every blade of grass is carefully dressed by the right, and a rock garden, which is the realization of the sailor's dream of a garden. A path just big enough for the feet crosses a chasm two feet wide by a rustic bridge eighteen inches long, and wanders amongst peaks as high as an umbrella, the crags of which are constructed with the most scrupulous neatness, and are free from the least speck of dirt. Has anybody ever wondered what becomes of the outlandish animals that the sailors in the pictures bring home with them in cages? They all come here. The parrots are flying about in an aviary beyond the peaks; the mandarin ducks, with every feather burnished, are swimming on a lake the size of a pocket handkerchief; the monkeys are near the parrots; and the kangaroos are having a

stand-easy in a paddock close by. They all look so clean that one guesses that they must be washed and scrubbed every morning with the upper deck.

Whale Island is more than a mere gunnery school; it is the tabernacle in which abides on earth the spirit of the Naval Discipline Act. Officers and men breathe there the pure atmosphere of the Service, and learn the forms and ceremonies of its ritual. After a course at Whale Island the nicer Service shades and the finer Service feelings are no longer a mystery. One knows the difference even between the naval and the military form of salute, and the exact extent of the area of palm that for the proper performance of the naval form must be visible out of the corner of the right eye. The authorities have a very ingenious way of reducing an officer on his arrival to the docile frame of mind which is necessary if he is perfectly to absorb the disciplinary atmosphere of the island. He is made to wear black boots, brown canvas gaiters, white flannel trousers, and a monkey jacket (the ordinary short blue uniform coat). These clothes make him feel such a guy that he loses all self-respect, and becomes clay in the hands of his instructors.

The chief things to be learned at Whale Island besides naval discipline are fire-control, gun drill, and the anatomy of guns. Gun drill is learnt in sweat and labour at the guns in the batteries, each member of the class acting in turn as each number of the gun's crew. The petty-officer instructors here are terrifying; they would reduce a nervous man to hysterics. The drill is all laid down in the book, and they declaim it by rote over and over again with stunning emphasis and precision. No

word is ever altered ; no sentence is ever put out of its place. At one point in the drill, for instance, comes the phrase " withdrawing the lever sufficiently far enough to clear the vent." " Sufficiently far enough " was endurable for once or twice, but at the hundredth sonorous repetition it became as unendurable as a toothache. For the instructor, however, it was enough that it was in the book, and so the drill proceeded to its triumphant close. " On the word fall *out* the gun's crew will fall *in*, in the rear of the gun."

Once and once only in my class we caught an instructor tripping, and he was quite a young one. He was in the habit of interrupting the drill to send us round at the double into the next casemate in order to put out an imaginary fire, a recognized exercise, but set by him with curious frequency. Coming back with unusual quietness one day, we found him shamefully consulting the drill book. The fires were nothing but a device to enable him to refresh his memory. His influence with us was gone for ever.

We filled up our spare time by learning about director firing, ammunition, range-finders, and fireworks. An old warrant officer who taught us about one of these in a lonely tower was the chief relaxation of our hard-worked days. He knew very little about his subject, and sensibly devoted his time to the cultivation of a remarkable faculty for continuous narrative. Staff officers would often look in upon us at our work, and long practice had made the narrator wonderfully skilful in making a passage *glissando* from his story back to business when one appeared at the door. " He had had one like," he would be saying, " or as it might be two ; and he

says to me, 'I didn't come aboard this ship to hear a barn-owl a-crowing like a duck in a dog-loft;' and I says to him, 'There's words I take any time,' I says, 'and words I take sometimes, and words I won't take the lever marked *p*, and by moving it towards the right bring *q* into line with the slide or shuttle *r*. Now do you follow that, sir?' and the staff officer would steal off on tiptoe from a scene of so much diligence and application.

Leaving Whale Island soon after the Battle of Jutland, I joined H.M.S. *Aurora*, Captain Wilmot Nicolson, at Harwich for a few weeks. The *Aurora* is a light cruiser of the same class as the *Arethusa*. Her captain was as open-minded about newcomers as the captain of the *Iron Duke* had been, and let me learn all that I could about navigation and pilotage and the humble necessary duties of an officer of the watch at sea. The navigator also was the most patient and encouraging of teachers, and I count my going to *Aurora* as a great stroke of good luck. We spent most of our time in Dover harbour, most inconvenient of all naval bases, past and through which the channel tides run like a mill race. The breakwaters there seem as transparent to the waves of the sea as a bit of glass is to the waves of light. The *Aurora* was the happiest of ships; everybody was always in a good temper and resignedly cheerful about the war. It was warm summer weather, and pleased with ourselves and with each other we basked in the sun on the quarter-deck, curled up to sleep in the Carly floats, or watched the innumerable four-ring jellyfish drifting with the tide in at one end of the harbour and out at the other, or we angled

for dabs over the stern, and were sleepy and content. The aeroplanes rose from the down above the castle, and circled round above the harbour, shining in the sun, before they made away over the sea to France. When we too went to sea it was to cross to Dunkerque by night and to spend the next four-and-twenty hours in patrolling the long barrier of anti-submarine nets that our side had laid all along the Belgian coast. It was a dreary business, and amongst the bored ships engaged upon it the barrier was known in secret as Bacon's Folly. Indeed it was hard to understand of what use it was. The German submarines might find it difficult to get through the nets, but there was no reason at all why they should not go round them ; it was shorter for them to do so ; and they did. The champions of the barrier had in the last resort to fall back upon the argument that it was very useful to protect the ships that were guarding it. As we steamed up and down the line of nets with nothing to do but to look out for the next of the numbered buoys that marked our beat, we could hear all the time the thumping of the guns on the front ashore, and on a clear day we could see the eruptions of smoke and earth where a big shell had hit. We could see, too, the lines of houses on the Flemish dunes drawn up by mirage into impossible sky-scrapers. One of the rows was all toothed and jagged : that was the ruins of Nieuport Bains, where the front ended. I looked at Nieuport Bains from the cruiser, thinking how interesting it would be there ashore, and eighteen months later I was looking at the cruisers from Nieuport Bains, thinking how restful it would be there afloat.

My quiet contemplation of the jellyfish in Dover har-

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bour was interrupted one day by a telegram to say that the *Centaur*, Captain Domville, was ready to commission at the Walker Yard on the Tyne, and I joined her there soon afterwards. The ship's officers arrived, most of them old *Arethusas*, and soon afterwards the new ship's company arrived too. We took up our quarters on board, and early in August (1916) Captain Domville hoisted his pennant on commissioning. In a new ship in a dockyard life is a misery. The wardroom stove and the radiators are not working yet, and it is very cold. The dockyard matey seems to delight in doing his work with as much dirt and disorder as possible. The ship, soon to be so spotlessly clean, so scrupulously tidy, looks still like a turnip garden, a scrap-heap, and a rag-and-bone shop all in one. Remains of the mateys' dinners and of their wardrobes litter up the dark places down below. There are riveters' furnaces on the quarter-deck, and the noise of their innumerable pneumatic hammers batters through the ship from end to end. Pneumatic supply pipes and hoses coil everywhere in the dark, a snare to the unwary. The wardroom hatches drip oil and water mixed with coal dust on to the tablecloth and down the back of the diner's necks. All who can do so get away from the ship, and as far away as possible. The unfortunate who must stay on board as officer of the day greets them on their return in the evening a soured man. When he went on deck he hurt himself over the snaky tubes and the mateys dropped red-hot rivets on him. His feelings were outraged by all the suspicious-looking strangers that kept swarming about the ship, and said that they were officials; and when he lost heart and went below,

the captain superintendent slipped on board and got off again without anybody noticing him.

After wearisome delays for the correction of mistakes and omissions that were disclosed by the first stirrings of the ship's life, at last she was finished, and we moved down to Tyneside to get things into shape before we went to sea. The ship must be in fighting trim by then ; there might be no chance later. Had not the *Arethusa*, our forerunner, fallen in for the battle of Heligoland on her trial trip ? While the guns and the engines were being worked up and the ammunition was coming on board the ship came fully to life. We cleaned her up, and got her into working order, we ran a steam trial as fast as we were expected to run it, and then one fine day we left the Tyne and turned north for Scapa Flow. We were an experiment, and the Navy was awaiting our arrival with curiosity. We were to the light cruisers of the " C " class that had preceded us as the super-Dreadnoughts were to the Dreadnoughts. Our predecessors had a lot of smaller guns in the batteries which could fire on one side only. We were the first light cruiser that, like the super-Dreadnoughts, had fewer guns of larger calibre, but all mounted on the centre line of the ship, so that all could fire on either beam. We had, in consequence, the heaviest broadside that any light cruiser had ever had. Another distinction of ours was that we were the first light cruiser to be fitted with the director system of firing, the general effect of which is that the guns are laid and fired, not each by itself, but all together by a director gunner who sits in a little nest up on the mast. As I stood on the quarter-deck and watched Flamborough Head crawling

by, my mind turned back to life in the *Iron Duke*, and I thought how different it was in the *Centaur*. A great battleship, I thought, is an island world in herself. She hardly pays any attention to the sea, and people in her hardly realize that they are sea-borne. The waves break against her and over her as if she were a rock, and she does not move. Even in the wildest weather the *Iron Duke* never gave a roll or a pitch in the North Sea. It was only when she went out to St. Kilda and met the long ocean swell that she bowed and curtsied for a time in majestic condescension to the Atlantic. Through ordinary waves she breasted her way with her enormous beam as if she were a giant planting her feet firmly on the bottom of the sea. But this beautiful slim creature, I thought, as she cleaves her way with furious speed, must swing and rise and fall and give herself to the waves. I feel that she is a ship, and that it is the sea that is supporting her, and feeling that for the first time, for the first time I feel like a sailor. In the *Iron Duke* I never felt more than at most a gunner ; but here I feel that I am on terms with the sea that are almost uncomfortably intimate, the quarter-deck is so very small and so very close to the green trough and white crest of the wave that flows away from our side.

We were steaming at twenty-five knots in order to shake the new engines together, and we were making a formidable stern wave. It pursued us madly, always a few feet behind, and piled itself up so high above our stern that it seemed as if next minute it must fall over on to the deck and sweep us all off into the sea. It leapt and bounded along behind, keeping pace with us, and

a bright sun made the boiling foam that crowned it flash and sparkle as if it had been a cascade of jewels. With the whirling of the turbines and the shafts and the streams of water hurled against her sides by the great propellers the ship throbbed, drummed, and vibrated from end to end. This gives one a fine impression of speed, I thought, but I wonder how it will affect sleep; and I went down to my cabin in order to find out. In a light cruiser there are no warrens and labyrinths, tier below tier, as there are in a battleship. A single passage at the stern of the ship runs fore and aft amidships, and the officers' cabins are placed on each side of it. My cabin was the aftermost on the port side. There were a bunk, a press, and a fold-up basin in it, and a writing-table which was too small to write at, but large enough to make a shrine for photographs and small treasures; they had to be glued on to the table, but the glue did not show. There was just enough clear space on the deck for a chair in which to sit if I was clever about my legs and put my feet on the radiator—a very good thing on which to put them in a North Sea winter. The cabin was a little abaft the propeller, and when we were going fast, and we nearly always were, the stream of water that the propeller threw out behind it thundered against the ship's side close to my ear. It was clear that the propellers and the vibration would make it all but impossible to sleep there at sea, and so I always found it. When the *Centaur* was steaming at more than eighteen knots there was no sound sleeping in the after cabins. At best, when I was dog-tired, I could achieve there that half-sleeping state when the real world and the world of dreams

become blended, and I would drift then for ages amongst overwhelming floods with cataracts thundering all round. But after a night watch the mere warmth and rest of a bunk are good enough, and when the *Centaur* was at sea it was no bad thing not to sleep too sound.

Next day the Pentland Skerries showed ahead, with Swona and Stroma and all the too-familiar landmarks of the first year of the war. Had we been returning to that sad prison to stay in it I think that the misery of the prospect would have been unendurable ; but we had come there for exercise only, and it was with something of the happy and emancipated feeling of an old boy who returns to his school in order to visit his less fortunate fellows who are still in bondage that, coming round the corner of Flotta, I saw the *Iron Duke* still in her place at the end of the lines of battleships. A year had passed since I had said good-bye to her, a year in which she had seen many changes. She flew the flag of a new Commander-in-Chief, and with the new Commander-in-Chief had come a new staff. But most of the officers of the ship were still the same as of old, and on watch as I mounted on to the familiar quarter-deck was a brand new sub-lieutenant who turned out to be James.

"Heavens !" said James, "what brings you back ? I thought that you were in Serbia."

I told him that I was in the *Centaur*, the new flagship for Harwich, and he sighed and complained that I had all the luck.

"In Tyrwhitt's ship !" he said. "You will be in everything that is going on ; he always is ;" and he told me that life in the Flow was even duller than it

was when I left, because there had been so much more of it, and now the routine was so familiar, and they had almost lost hope of anything ever happening.

"If they are badly beaten ashore," I reminded him, "they will surely come out as a forlorn hope before the end."

"But they are not beaten ashore," lamented James, "and it does not look much like it;" and indeed in July 1916 it did not look at all like it. It was one of the most stationary times of the war, when a military victory for either side looked most remote and improbable; and at such times, when things were going well with the enemy, the Navy had, in addition to the common causes of depression, this special cause, that hope grew dim for that last desperate sortie by which the *Hoch See Flotte* might be expected to try and redeem a lost cause. Under the weight of these heavy thoughts James drooped over his telescope like Patience on a monument. My heart bled for him; and to console him I said that I did not suppose that the *Centaur* would find many battles to fight after all.

"She will find all that there are," he sighed; "*he* always does. And in any case you will be a lot at sea, not like us, six weeks in harbour, and then out for a P.Z.* and in again.

Poor James! Never did Fate cast men for a more unwelcome part than that for which it cast him and all the thousands of the Grand Fleet. They must sit still, their wonderful machine unused and their wonderful capacities all unexercised. For the battle squadrons the Battle of Jutland even, that half-hour of action snatched

* A sham fight.

from the failing light, was but an aggravation of disappointment. Year after year they must sit still and feed on hope, and try to contain themselves when people told them that really and truly it was they who were winning the war. When I told James that, his exasperation got the better of him, and he said that, as far as he was concerned, the war was not worth winning that way.

The *Centaur* withdrew to the far side of the Flow, and spent several days steaming about in the less frequented part of the great pool, running torpedoes, adjusting her compasses, and finding out how fast she could stop and turn. When our preliminary works were over, we joined the local light cruiser squadrons for a practice shoot at the mouth of the Pentland Firth, and then we waved good-bye to the Flow, and steamed away southwards again for Harwich. Our route was along the War Channel. Not much has been heard of that great highway of the seas, although its establishment, maintenance, and defence were some of the principal achievements of our seamen in the war. It was an imaginary lane stretching the whole length of the east coast from the Orkneys to the Channel. In parts, where the navigation was at all difficult, it was marked by buoys. Throughout its length it was ceaselessly swept by fleets of mine-sweepers, and patrolled by small armed craft, motor launches, torpedo boats, P-boats and destroyers. It afforded thus a route of comparative safety for the coast-wise traffic. Absolute safety from mines laid by submarines it was impossible to secure, especially when they had learnt the trick of waiting till the sweepers had passed and then following them to lay mines in their

wake ; but the War Channel was as safe a sea road as could be had, and up and down it passed all the traffic between the east coast ports of Great Britain and the rest of the world. The traffic in the channel was so dense that it had to be regulated like the traffic in a London street. At the chief crossings, such as those at the mouth of the Thames, the Humber and the Tyne, P-boats patrolled backwards and forwards like policemen patrolling a beat. If for some reason it was necessary to stop the traffic, if a mine-field had been found in the channel for instance, or if there was reason to expect an enemy raid, policeman P-boat held out his arm, and all the ships stopped and turned into the nearest safe roadstead until he dropped it again.

To steam down the War Channel on a fine summer day was to have an object lesson in the meaning of sea power, and in the nature of the effort required to maintain it. Off some part of the coast remote from any port one might see a dozen or so of mine-sweeping trawlers pounding along the channel, two and two, with a sweep between each pair, and their raised bows cocked up into the air. When they see us approaching with the wave leaping away in a curl of foam from our bows they ask us anxiously by flag and siren to reduce speed lest our wash should break the straining hawsers of the sweep. A pair of little old torpedo boats are strolling about keeping an eye on them for fear of submarines. Next a smudge of smoke is seen on the horizon, and presently there appears a whole fleet of merchant vessels, stringing out in a line along the channel, big tramps and little tramps—British, Norwegian, Swedish, Dutch, and Danish. There has been a “stop,” it

seems, at the next port, perhaps for some mines to be swept up. It has just been taken off, and this is the accumulation of traffic that has been released all together, with the faster ships drawing ahead of the slower as they all hurry on their way up the channel. It is before the days of the openly ruthless submarine war, and all the neutral ships have their national flags painted on their sides as a protection. Most of them dip their ensigns civilly to us as we surge by ; one on whose side is painted the flag of a neutral whose neutrality is far from friendly pays no outward attention to us, but we see her master gazing long at us through his glasses. When he next gets to Bremen or Lübeck he will have something to tell to the German intelligence officers. We wonder whether he has the wit to notice in the *silhouette* that he sees of us the new and formidable disposal of our guns. If he has, his information will give the enemy's light cruisers something to think about. Now we are approaching the Tyne, and the War Channel becomes more and more full of life. A division of destroyers passes us on its way north to the Forth or the Flow, and then a half-sister of ours, a light cruiser of the older *Arethusa* class. There never were more beautiful little ships to look at ; their fine, slender lines and the rake of their masts and funnels make them a picture of speed and grace. It must be admitted that we are not so beautiful ; our bridge and mast are thrust far forward on the forecastle in order to allow room for an extra gun behind them, and that gives us an overweighted look forward ; but we could blow our relation out of the water. Here come a pair of the big paddle mine-sweepers which began life as Margate picnic boats.

With their great power and shallow draft they are very useful indeed. Probably they are on their way out into the North Sea to explore some suspected area, and they will have an anxious time so far afield and out of the way of help. A division of motor launches is coming out of the Tyne, four of them, shooting along one behind the other and looking in comparison with all the bigger ships like busy little waterfowl. They are keeping an eye open for submarines ; but what they would do with one if they found it, since they have no guns, is not quite clear. There is policeman P-boat on his beat ; with his low hull almost invisible and his bridge sticking up like a conning tower he looks rather like a submarine. In the early days of P-boats, before zealous submarine chasers became used to their appearance, the resemblance caused some embarrassing mistakes.

With Tyne and Humber passed traffic in the War Channel grew less dense, and we were left to pick our way in solitude from buoy to buoy until, turning round the south of the Outer Gabbard shoal, we wound our way along the channel through the shallows that leads into Harwich. Commodore Tyrwhitt had been impatiently awaiting his new flagship ; the same evening he came on board and hoisted his broad pennant, and we were started on our career.

The Harwich force was a strong force of light cruisers and destroyers, the first line of our Navy in defence and attack. Its work was to be ever on the alert to observe, to delay, and to prevent the movements of any enemy ship that might venture beyond the mine-fields in the Bight of Heligoland, or sally out from Ostend or Zeebrugge. It lived at Harwich because it was nearer

there to the scene of action, and so was more readily available than it would have been at any northern base. It was useful there also as a defence to the eastern coast, as a support to the Dover patrols, as a menace to Zeebrugge and Ostend, and as a protection to the Dutch traffic. With our other chief naval forces so far north, and with small ships only in the channel, but for the Harwich force the enemy's light cruisers could have slipped down south, have done what they liked on the east coast and in the southern waters of the North Sea, and have slipped back home again before anybody could catch them. We lay at rest at our buoys for days on end until a familiar and none too popular hoist of flags went up to our yard, "Light cruisers and destroyers," it said, "raise steam for full speed with all possible dispatch," and then in an hour or so we would cast off and crawl down the narrow and winding channel, taking the first turning to the right and through the boom, then a sharp turning to the left round the Beach-end buoy, and so away to the Sunk lightship, while one by one the cruisers and destroyers fell into line behind us until there was a long snake of twenty or thirty vessels winding about and playing follow-my-leader round the buoys. It was a fine sight to see from the shore or a passing ship, that sinuous file of sea-racers, all keeping station at regular intervals while the speed of their going cut the water at their bows into feathers of green, and the wash of it foamed out behind in white cascades. At sundown we would fall into night-cruising order, cruisers in the middle and destroyers on each side, and dawn would find us over on the Dutch coast near the Texel or the mouth of the Scheldt. Thence

we would often run down to the Hinder lightship in the middle of the southern angle of the North Sea, and, getting from her our exact position, we would turn home again, falling into line ahead to wind into harbour through the shoals off Felixstowe.

During our first weeks at Harwich we were still "working up" the ship. The first lieutenant scoured, scraped, and painted her, and soon nobody would have known her for the dirty scrap-heap that we had found in the Tyne. It was something of a sacramental occasion when, all else being in order, the stanchions of the guard-rail on the quarter-deck received a coat of silver paint. Meanwhile for me all other cares were obliterated by anxieties about a sick gun. I had been set to use what knowledge I had acquired at Whale Island in charge of the two after guns, one of which was on the quarter-deck and the other just above it on a raised platform that made the top of the Commodore's cabin in the superstructure. It was number four gun, the upper of the two, that fell ill with an attack of misfires. There were six or seven alternative ways of firing it—from the first director circuit down to the last and simplest expedient of pulling the trigger with a lanyard. We would test them all through before firing and find them all right; but when we began to shoot, after the second or third round the gun would misfire, and thereafter would miss about every other salvo. In vain then did I ring the changes on all the alternative circuits; one was no better than another. As soon as the attack came on the only way to be sure of getting the gun off at all was to cut out all the electrical circuits, to ship a percussion lock, and to pull the trigger with

the lanyard, and that was a slow business. The most annoying thing of all was that when the shoot was over and I said to myself, "Now I can trace out the cause of the disease at leisure," on testing the circuits I would find them all in perfect working order again. For weeks the gun and its ailment preyed on my mind. Suppose we went into action with it in that state! There would be quite enough to think about in our first action without a misfiring gun. It seemed probable that some part of the firing circuits was shaken out of its place by the shock of the recoil, and fell back into it again when the gun had had a little time in which to cool and to settle down. But for a long time it baffled us to find the part at fault. Suspicion gradually centred on a certain little brass knob, a contact stud on the breech-block, through which the electric currents that fired the gun were made to pass as a safeguard against its going off with the breech imperfectly closed. But even after the gun had been fired several times, and was in the middle of one of its attacks, the stud answered to all direct tests, and seemed to be making good contact. The gunnery lieutenant, however, was unconvinced of its innocence. One fine day we cut it out of the system altogether by short-circuiting it with a bit of wire, and that day the gun fired all right. We changed the stud, and the gun never misfired again; so the disease was cured, although the mystery was never wholly explained.

As we came back into the river on the first day that the gun had been induced to behave itself, and so my mind was easy again, I said to myself, "It is a wonderful romance to be going about the North Sea

in this beautiful and terrible creature as a small part of her living will ; and there is more in it than mere romance—one can really feel directly and keenly here that one is doing something to prevent the world from being Prussianized. There is work to do here that, if one did not do it, would not be done, and so there is a trifle of responsibility, not much but just enough to make the long idle hours in harbour endurable.” My thoughts turned back then to those longer and idler hours in the Flow. How questionable it had all seemed then, the war, and my own part in it ! With some surprise I realized that I was not now troubled about such questions at all. “ Why used it to seem so difficult ? ” I thought. “ It seems as plain as a pikestaff now. Perhaps I ought to thank the Germans for making it clear, by what they have done in Serbia and Belgium, how very much they are in the wrong. But to be honest with myself, I do not think now that it would make much difference to me if I thought that they were in the right ; I should still be glad to be here. The truth is that the presentiment that Kenneth and I felt when first we saw Duncansby Head has been fulfilled. This wonderful organ of England, the Navy, so much greater and more vital than the individual Englishman, has caught me as it catches all the rest, and it has digested me. I feel as monks felt in the age of faith, that I am content to follow a rule that expresses a will bigger and less fallible than my own. The group to whose will the monk submitted was an artificial and an unwholesome group ; but here we submit our wills to a group which, as far as we are concerned, is the most real and wholesome of all, our country ; and it is our

special good fortune that our country's will is expressed to us in this sea-voice of hers which is so much the most natural and honest of her many voices. I am glad that I am listening to her natural voice, and not to those shrill and confused tones of hers that I used to hear when I was on leave in London. At any rate I am sure that whatever may be the reason for what I am doing I could not now do otherwise. How dreadful it is to think that but for the accident of Kenneth ringing Vincent up on the telephone that evening I might still be in London. I should never, had I stayed in London, have been nearly so much alive as I am." An idea came to me then which pleased me. "In these tremendous days," I thought, "on active service at sea and ashore, living is so much more intense and vital than it is in ordinary days that those who have not lived such days as these are in comparison with those who have lived them but half alive. Their being is not half so real; and if that is so, then they are not half so able to form a judgment about the purpose of their being. I should like to put that to a conscientious objector. I should say, 'You may be right or the sailors and soldiers may be right, but certainly you are not so well qualified as they are to decide the question, because in comparison with them you are only a semi-animated thing, a walking shadow. You have refused the chance to become otherwise.'"

I was standing near the newly reformed gun, and the captain of its crew was at work about it, spending a leisure hour in putting some extra polish on to its brasswork. I looked at him and wondered what he would say to a conscientious objector. He was a big

petty officer with the physique of a bull and a head that would have fitted a leader of *condottieri* in the Middle Ages—broad brow, square jaw, straight nose that had for all its straightness a suggestion of the hawk about it. It is a type that is peculiar to the Navy, and it is the true naval type. The beaming round-faced idiot of the comic paper and the music hall is a conventional libel. "He would make a very bad casuist," I thought, "to argue with a conscientious objector; but he is a very good petty officer. He would keep the gun in action until the ship sank under him, and he would make the gun's crew stay with him too; he has them in the hollow of his hand. I do not care whether or not he understands why he must stay there while the ship sinks under him; it is good to be in the same boat with him."

It was not very lively when we were in harbour to pace the deck of the ship and to watch the tide ebb and flow, covering and uncovering the mud flats of Shotley; but when we were at sea all was well, and the best part of the times at sea was when one was on watch on the bridge. It was then that one shared most closely in the life of the ship and became most intimately a part of her organism. When the officer of the watch mounts to the elevated little platform and the upper bridge, and "takes over" from his predecessor, he falls as it were into a niche in the ship's brain, and becomes for four hours a part of her thoughts. He finds himself equipped with a new outfit of organs. He has eyes as complex as a fly's. Some of the lenses are below on the signal bridge and above in the top, they are the look-out men there; and there is a strong lens at

his side, the yeoman of signals with his spy-glass. He has a powerful new voice, the siren, whose lanyard is fastened to the rail behind him. The propellers may pass for his legs, and the guns, some of which are always manned, for his arms; he controls them by means of the voice-pipes whose brass mouths bristle all round him. Above all there is the compass, an organ which furnishes him with a new sense, the sense of direction. He stands with his eyes glued to it, watching the card swing to the left and right of the course which he has received from his new intelligence, the navigator. If it swings more than a degree or two he admonishes the quartermaster at the wheel down a voice-pipe. The wheel is far below, hidden in the bowels of the ship, where there is another compass for the quartermaster to steer by. If the officer of the watch wants to turn the ship to port or to starboard he gives an order to the quartermaster down the pipe, port or starboard, and the amount of helm, from five degrees for a very slow turn up to thirty degrees or more for a very quick one.

The upper bridge of a light cruiser is the wettest and most windy place in the whole of creation. Oil-skins even, however well they fit, are an imperfect defence against the wet there. The draughts that whistle about the platform take the rain, mist and spray, and blow them round the corners and up from below, mocking at the double flaps of one's coat and at the towel around one's neck. The *Centaur's* upper bridge had another discomfort: it was exceptionally small, about the size of an ordinary horse box, it was encumbered with a big range-finder, and it had an exceptionally large and august population. At the front

of the bridge and on the right of the binnacle stood the Commodore, brooding for hours at a time over the waters, as silent and motionless as an eagle in its eyrie. On the left was the Captain's beat, one step backwards and one step forwards. Behind, the Commodore's flag-commander had to fit himself in with his signalman and a messenger or two ; and as often as not the navigator would be on the bridge too. Amongst the lot of them the harmless necessary officer of the watch must wriggle about from compass to voice-pipe to perform his duties, happy if he might escape observation and keep out of everybody's way. The amount of gold lace that was always about reduced his responsibilities to a very small affair. As long as the Commodore, Captain, or navigator was there he had not much to do but to pass on the orders. After I had been at the business for some time I began to think that now that I knew absolutely all about the work it would be rather good to have the ship to myself for a time and to exercise my talents ; but I had long to wait before that time came. The Commodore, Captain, or navigator, one or more of them, was always on the bridge, and when they were, and there was something to be done, they always thought of it just five seconds before I did. But at last the time came. It was a fine clear morning, and we were leading the force back to Harwich after a blank night out. The Commodore, who had been on the bridge all night, cast a look of disgust round at the sea, so empty of Germans, and went below. The navigator had not yet come up to take us in. The Captain only was left. His servant came up to say that breakfast was ready in his sea-cabin close below. He took no notice

for a moment, and I shrugged my inward shoulders in disgust. Then—triumph!—he turned and went slowly down. Did he pause to cast a dubious look at me as he left the bridge? What matter? At last I was left alone in charge of the ship.

It was plain sailing at first. We were leading, so that I had no trouble about keeping station. The other division of cruisers was away to port, the destroyers were on both sides of us, and as for the rest of our own division, that I could feel but could not see to be treading on my tail, it was their business to keep station on me. All that I had to do was to hold the last course set by the navigator. It was bright and clear, the sea was calm, and there was not a ship in sight. An eventless quarter of an hour passed, and I began to wish that something would happen. Suppose now that I saw something over there on the starboard bow, a white feather running along the water—the periscope of a submarine. “Port thirty!” I would call down the voice-pipe with admirable promptitude. Round the ship would spin, the white wake of a torpedo would draw a streak across our bows, just to make it sure that the submarine was an enemy, and in ten seconds the ship would give a jump, and pause, and go on, while the exultant crew craning over the side would see a sharp and broken beak rise upright for a moment from the waves and plunge down again for ever. Avoiding, with the utmost dexterity, the curious and excited destroyers, I would bring the ship round and back on to her course, and the Commodore and the Captain would rush up on to the bridge just as we were passing through the oil and floating wreckage that rose from the sunken submarine. Great

would be the sensation ! The Commodore would say " Good ! " and " No old seaman," somebody would say, " could have handled the ship better."

I was just receiving the thanks of their Lordships on vellum when I was aware, not of a German submarine, but of two aged British tramps. We were about to cross the War Channel, and they were steaming along it at equal distances from me and in opposite directions. " Silly old things ! " I thought, and returned to my day-dream. When I looked at them again I was a little startled to notice how much closer together we all seemed to be. Feeling a trace of nervousness, I took their bearings, and in a minute or two took them again : they were unchanged. If we went on as we were going we should all three meet in a point. " Heavens ! " I exclaimed, " I shall have to give an order."

The tramps were a good way off still, but we were doing twenty-two knots, and I knew that I must take measures betimes. " Whatever ought I to do ? " I thought. " Ought I to turn to port or to starboard ? What will the other divisions do, and the ships behind ? Ought I to sound the siren to warn them that I am going to turn ? How many blasts is it for port and how many for starboard ? I know it as well as I know my alphabet, but I have forgotten." I gazed at the long, orderly rows of the cruisers and destroyers. " What a terrible responsibility to do something which will affect them all ! They are waiting for me and wondering what I am going to do. If I do something unexpected and wrong there will be a collision—I know that there will." I gazed in a fever at the converging tramps. " In twenty seconds I will alter course to port—or to star-

board. Time is up, now!—no, I will wait twenty seconds more. *Why doesn't the Captain come up?* ”

All three of us seemed now to be rushing together as if drawn by a relentless and inevitable fate. With an immense effort and a wan look behind at the following ships I leaned over the voice-pipe and called hoarsely, “Starboard—no, port ten—no, five!” and glared at the compass-card for the first sign of an answering movement. Would the card never begin to turn? It did not budge, and the tramps filled the whole horizon. “Port fifteen—no, twenty!” I called in a frenzy of anxiety. At once the blessed card began to spin. Glancing behind I saw the line of following ships leaping after me round the curve. The tramps as we turned came both of them swinging round on to the port bow. In a minute or two they were on our beam, and we were past them with a mile at least of sea between us. With an inexpressible sense of relief I brought the ship back to her course, and not without a tremor at the knees approached the Captain's voice-pipe. Captains have a familiar spirit who tells them what is happening on the bridge in their absence. I might yet find myself in for it.

“I have altered course, sir, to avoid a passing ship,” I reported, striving to attain an unconcerned tone of voice.

“Very good,” said the Captain.

When we were at sea by night we three junior watch-keepers did not keep watch on the bridge—that was kept then by the three seniors, the first lieutenant, the gunnery lieutenant, and the senior watch-keeper; our

watch was in the top in control of the guns that were manned for "night defence." Roused out of a warm bunk or from an uneasy sleep on a chair in the poisonous atmosphere of the sealed-up wardroom one put on all the waistcoats and coats to be had, and groping one's way forward along the narrow and precarious pathway of the fore and aft bridge, clambered like a monkey up the iron rungs on the tripod mast, lifting the weight of coats and seaboots by sheer force of biceps and clinging with numbed fingers to the cold iron against the tearing of the wind, while the motion of the ship swung one about over the rushing water that looked so black and dim and so far below. Arrived outside the enclosed top, one would pound at the iron shutter until it was opened from within, and then squeeze painfully through the hole and tumble on to one's predecessor as he crouched on a stool in the tiny, crowded chamber, that shook and swayed about in the darkness up there between sea and sky. A night-watch in the *Centaur's* top was neither so long nor so very tedious as those other night-watches had been in the boxes on the bridge of the *Iron Duke*. We cut them down to a couple of hours at a time, and watches in the *Centaur* had the great advantage over watches in the *Iron Duke* that they had always the possibility of stirring events, and sometimes, as will be seen, stirring events did happen. One had not in the *Centaur* the hopeless feeling that nothing ever would or could happen again. One spent the watch, on the contrary, very much on the alert, and expecting anything to happen at any minute. These were narrow waters that we were in; the enemy's destroyers from the Belgian bases were often at sea, and any night we

might fall in with them or even with the First Scouting Group (the German armoured cruisers) stealing down from the Jade river for another raid at dawn on Lowestoft or Yarmouth. Dawn was ever our critical time at sea. In the dark, hostile ships may pass each other within half a mile and never know it, but daybreak shows all that lies within the circle of the horizon, and may bring with it a pleasant or an unpleasant surprise. As one crouched on watch in the top, far over in the Broad Fourteens, at the first gray hint of dawn one would sit up and pull one's self together, test all the telephones to the guns, and have a "dummy run" with them, craning over the iron edge for a bird's-eye view of the long, thin deck below in order to see as well as one could in the faint hint of light whether the guns were answering properly to the orders and swinging round all together on to the prescribed bearing. When all was well below one sat back and swept with one's glasses in the half light round and round the horizon, feeling with one's eyes for the little blot or smudge, blacker than the surrounding blackness, that would tell one that there was something there. What would it be? Perhaps destroyers going in relief to Zeebrugge, which would have to run from us and would give us an exhilarating chase; perhaps the First Scouting Group, and we should have an equal fight; perhaps the Second Scouting Group (the German battle-cruisers), from which we should have to run, and which would give us a chase that would not exhilarate us at all. But would the Commodore run from them? He had not run from them at Lowestoft. If he did not do so, we should have an opportunity of finding out how many hits from

12-inch guns a light cruiser can take without sinking. At Lowestoft one of them had taken two without being put out of action. She had been lucky, no doubt, but still the precedent was encouraging.

Once we were steaming west between Terschelling light and the Dogger Bank when the first streak of dawn showed me as I sat in the top four smudges of smoke along the northern horizon. They were at regular intervals, which suggested that they were made by a squadron of warships, and we had no information that any of our own ships were in that neighbourhood. "It looks like business," I said to myself; and on the word a hoist of flags fluttered up to the yard just below me. "Turn in succession eight points to starboard," they said; and round the squadron and flotillas wheeled to the north. "I wonder what they are," I thought. "Patrolling destroyers perhaps. I am sure that I hope so." But just then in the lessening distance and the increasing light I thought that I could see something that sent the snails creeping up my spine. In a minute or two there was no more doubt about it. Sticking up above the horizon there were four tall spikes with large square structures on them. "Lord!" I thought, "it is four monsters—battle-cruisers. Now what will the Commodore do?" At once another hoist came fluttering up to the yard below. "Chase!" it said; and at the laconic word the whole force shot off after the monsters, working up to full speed. A few exciting moments only passed before we recognized in the monsters four of our own battle-cruisers; but when the signal was made it was thought to be most probable that they were Germans. Had they been so I do not

suppose that the Commodore would have offered to them direct action with the light cruisers ; it would not have been common sense. I suppose that he would have hung on to them in order to keep them under observation and perhaps have made torpedo attacks upon them with the destroyers. A risky business it would have been, but risky with the sort of risk that the Harwich Force was there to take ; and it was the perfect certainty born of many little incidents of the sort that the Commodore would take every legitimate risk rather than let slip the least chance of injuring the enemy that made it so good to sail with him. Why, I wonder, when one thinks of the Commodore, does one always think too of eagles ? I should compare the Commodore at Harwich to a hovering osprey, with attention as concentrated upon the business in hand and with reactions as swift. When a possible prey moved in the sea, in the twinkling of an eye, while other birds were making up their minds whether it was safe or worth while to go for it, his wings had come together with a clap and he had swooped.

It was a surprise at dawn that brought the *Centaur* her first battle, and indeed all her battles but one, and that was brought by a still bigger surprise. On this first occasion we were steaming west in the neighbourhood of the North Hinder shoal, some thirty-five miles N.N.W. of Ostend, in company with two other light cruisers and a half-dozen or so of destroyers. The Captain, thinking, I suppose, that an encounter was not improbable in waters so near to the Belgian bases of the destroyers, sent us to action stations at 3 a.m., in order to be ready for the dawn. When all was in order at the guns I settled down at my chief charge, No. 4, the gun that

was perched up on top of the Commodore's cabin, and looked out over the quarter-deck. There was a not too uncomfortable seat to be had there on the flap of the ammunition hoist ; it was just at the end of the fore and aft bridge, the gangway that ran all along the ship above the deck and connected the gun-platforms and the signal-bridge, so that I was well placed there to get the news from people as they went to and from the bridge, where alone in a ship at sea does anybody know anything about what is going on. "How different is my action station here," I reflected, "from what it was in the *Iron Duke* ! There in her shell-room I was miles down in the bowels of the ship, and I was hardly aware of the sea. Here I am aware of it, and very vividly. On this small and elevated platform my relations with the waves that I can hear swishing past in the darkness close below are almost unpleasantly intimate. Two steps in any direction and a stumble or a lurch of the ship and I should roll off and never be heard of again. There is a wind here, and in the wind there is cutting rain. The rigging hums, the waves wash, and the ship sways and trembles with her speed. I am aware that I am in a ship at sea, and that the sea is very big and the ship very small. How very big the sea is, and how very dark a dark night is ! People sometimes wonder why the Germans are allowed to come over and bombard our coast on dark nights, and they say that we ought to catch them. I wish those people would come and sit here and help us to catch the Germans on a dark night at sea.

The gun's crew had rigged a canvas wind-screen, and were huddled in the shelter of it, invisible but

audible as they moaned the refrain of a sentimental ballad about "the light of memory." The boy with the telephone and the hood of the voice-pipe over his head was crouched at my feet where I could stir him up to a sense of his responsibilities when he nodded. A misty dawn broke slowly, and I could see nothing in the whole circle of the sea. But suddenly the alarm bell rang, and the crew jumped to the gun. "Another tedious exercise," I thought; "and it is a bad practice to ring the alarm bells for an exercise—it is making them too common. Besides, he has forgotten that when the alarm bell is rung I load the gun." The breech smacked to. "Now we cannot get the shell out again; it must be fired and wasted; but it is his fault, not mine." The telephone boy clutched the telephone to his ear and holloaed out, "Bring the guns to the ready." "Now this is very irregular," I pondered. "He ought not to bring loaded guns to the ready like that for exercise. They might go off." In director firing the crew at the gun need not know anything at all about what they are firing at or when they are going to fire. They do not themselves train or lay the gun on the target by looking at the target along the sights; all that they do when they have loaded the gun is to keep certain pointers in line; that trains and lays the gun automatically, and then the gun is fired by the director gunner in his nest on the mast whenever he pleases. All this time the guns had been waving and turning, and were now pointing almost as far forward as they could point. "This is a queer sort of exercise," I thought; and then at a single bound I jumped out of my skin, for with a lovely crash the whole of *Centaur's* broadside went off like one gun,

and the ship reeled and my ears sang with the blow, and the fire-balls at the muzzles swelled and burst, blotting everything out for a moment from my dazzled eyes. There was a detonation inside my mind too as tremendous as our broadside. Action ! it said. It's a battle ! A voice was calling to the petty officer, who was so like a captain of *condottieri*, invoking its sainted aunt, bidding him reload, and proclaiming its conviction that there was something there. But before the voice had spoken the great figure had swung the breech open and swept the crew about its business with a single gesture. The clang of the closing breech and the bellow of the second salvo seemed all one sound. "Whatever are we fighting ?" I thought, but without much concern. There was room for one idea only in my head. "At last, this makes sense of the whole thing." There was a pause, and I had time to look ahead and to try to see what it was all about. It was a battle, but a very little one, and all on one side. There was a line of smudges of smoke so far off that I could only just see them : it was some destroyers from Zeebrugge. We had seen them at extreme range, and were chasing them back to their base, firing at them in order to speed their going. We were a long way out of range of their guns. They could go much faster than we could, and they soon drew out of range of us ; so the Commodore abandoned the chase, sending some destroyers on to catch them if they could ; but they couldn't. I had no misfires, and all went well at the guns, except that one of the loading numbers, who had come recently to sea, was found to suffer from a nervous weakness which caused him to drop his projectile and to clap his hands

over his ears whenever the gun went off. A more suitable occupation was found for him with an ammunition party below.

It was not much of an affair, this first battle of ours, no more than half a dozen salvos dropped behind the tails of the German destroyers as they vanished into the mine-fields of Zeebrugge; but only to have fired the guns in action was a notable satisfaction. How foolish we should have felt if the ship had finished the war without ever firing at the Germans at all! We had fired often enough at Zeppelins, it was true; north-east of a certain point we were fairly sure on fine days to see one of the gray ghosts hanging about on the horizon, and then if it showed any disposition to approach us we used to throw a shrapnel shell in its direction in order to warn it to keep off. But Zeppelins were only vermin; destroyers were game.

We had months to wait for our second battle. It did not come until the night of January 22nd-23rd, 1917. For a long time we had been twiddling our thumbs in harbour and bearing as patiently as we could the wet, bleak, and very cold weather that the winds of January blow into the havens of our eastern coast. One afternoon I had turned into my bunk with a bad cold in my head, when I heard the familiar stir which announces that the ship is about to go to sea—the trampling and thumping overhead on the quarter-deck, the noise of the screwing up of scuttles, and the sudden, brief thresh of the propellers as the engineers try the main engines. It was really very depressing; it was going to be very cold, my head was buzzing already like a bee, and when we began to go the vibration would make it buzz

like a whole hive. Good-bye to sleep for the coming night ! Instead of sleeping I should lie awake and think of mines. They had a way of missing all the rest of the the ship until they were touched off by the propeller. There was the propeller, just down there below my bunk ! I thought of the story that a man had told me once how he was asleep in his bunk, just like this, when the ship hit a mine, and he was woke up by falling into the sea a hundred yards away. The propellers began to thresh in earnest, and the steering engines rattled as we made the familiar turns that took us out into the North Sea. It grew very cold, and I could hear the wind wuthering up on deck. I piled all the coats within reach on top of me and fell into a doze. The ship buzzed and my head buzzed, and in my doze I thought that I was the ship and that there was a turbine in my brain. If I could shut off steam from it I should ease the buzzing, but climbing about perilous iron ladders amongst vast engines I could not find the tap. The curtain over the cabin door swayed with the swaying ship and let in gleams of light from the passage. Hours passed, interrupted only by the noises of the changing watch, and it was about three o'clock in the morning when my dulled senses were cleared by an electric shock—the sudden, urgent, menacing er-r-r-r ! of the alarm rattlers sounding their harsh call all over the ship. It is the most tremendous noise in the world. No other emotion could ever be so intense as that with which one hears it unexpectedly in war time, by night and at sea. One does not know what it means, but only that some great crisis and danger are at hand. The blood goes leaping to one's heart and back again, and a physical

shrinking possesses one—the shrinking which comes with the feeling that one is going to be hit and one does not know the quarter from which the blow is coming; while through one's mind there whirls a rout of emotions, seemly and unseemly, apprehension, hesitation, and, mastering all else, a wild excitation. At the tremendous moment when the rattlers sound there may be consternation in the background of one's mind, but it is lost at first in the exultation of approaching action. Unseemly thoughts whirl about, shouting, "Danger! you are going to be killed;" but others are there too, shouting, "It is come! Lord, what a five minutes you are going to have!" and for the first few seconds at least those other thoughts shout the louder.

I will tell first what actually happened in the battle, and then what it seemed like to me. We had gone over to the Dutch coast to try to intercept a relief force of destroyers believed to be coming down from a German port to Zeebrugge, and we were steaming north-east about ten miles east of the Schouwen Bank, which lies off the mouth of the Scheldt. In order to increase his chances of falling in with the enemy in the dark the Commodore had split up his forces. There were two other light cruisers in company with us, another division of light cruisers was following us at a distance, and the destroyers were well away to the south. Our division of three light cruisers was steaming at eighteen knots in line ahead, with the *Centaur* leading, when suddenly the last cruiser in our line was aware in the pitch dark of some patches of faint red light. They were the glow from the funnels of half a dozen German destroyers coming up on our port quarter at a speed greatly exceed-

ing ours. She winked the news stealthily up the line and said nothing. The enemy shot across behind our line without seeing us, and began to pass us to starboard on a divergent course. They cannot have known that we were there until we opened fire on them, which we did at about one thousand yards' range, the last cruiser first and then the other two in succession. The enemy replied with a brisk but ill-directed fire, and most of his shells went a long way over us. There was no glow from our funnels, and the flash of our guns was all that he had to shoot at. He fired torpedoes, and the Commodore turned four points to port to avoid them. Then we edged right round in a half-circle towards the enemy in order to head him off, while the guns on both sides shot away as hard as they could. The enemy in his turn edged away from us, working up to top speed; and when he had turned eight points to starboard he broke up his formation, dashed away in all directions, and disappeared into the dark. One of our last shots set the last destroyer in his line on fire, and she dropped behind. The Commodore did not wait to attend to her; it is ill waiting about on so dark a night with a lot of wild destroyers near by, all with their torpedoes particularly ready. We continued the pursuit; but the destroyers, of course, had the legs of us, and we did not see them again. Some of them fell in with our other division of cruisers and with our destroyers, and got a second and a third hammering. Next day the remains of a German destroyer managed to struggle into a Dutch harbour in a sinking state; probably it was that which we had seen set on fire.

That was what actually happened and what was known

to those who were on the bridge during the action ; but not being on the bridge I had no such clear idea of the proceedings, or indeed any very clear idea about them at all. The noise of the rattlers brought me out of my bunk and into sea-boots and woollies in a series of instinctive convulsions. I was stumbling along the passage towards the ladder, with the one idea, "What's up?" filling the whole of my head, when, just as I got underneath my No. 5 gun, off it went immediately overhead with a tonk that drove my skull down between my shoulders, while the blast of it down the hatch hit me like a club. It is awkward to get on deck when the guns are in action in the dark. If one comes out carelessly on the engaged side, one may get oneself killed by the blast. I took advantage of the short interval that there would be for reloading to tumble up the ladder on to the quarter-deck and round into the rear of No. 5. A freezing wave came over the side, slapped me on the back, and nestled down into my sea-boots. The spray froze as it fell, and there was ice on the water-tubs at the guns. In the excitement of their first night action the crew of No. 5 were a little flurried. Somebody was shouting, "The belt—where's the bloody belt?" It was the belt of firing tubes that he wanted, and it was in fact round his own waist. There was a good deal of rummaging and swearing in the dark, and the gun did not get loaded in time for the next salvo ; the other guns went off without it. But in a minute the crew had found their gear and settled down, and I could go on up to No. 4, whose last shell had just gone whooping away over our heads and out on to the starboard quarter. No. 4 was very much all right. All that I could see of

the *condottiere* in the dark was a black mass standing motionless by the faintly-illuminated director dial ; but I could feel him steadying the crew by some invisible influence. As usual, we knew nothing about what was going on. It was the pointers that we had to watch, and there was no time at first to look outboard. The guns turned forward, back again aft, and then forward again, and they were being fired rather slowly. " We are shooting at two ships passing us to starboard," I thought ; but as a matter of fact it was our own unperceived turns that caused the turning motion of the guns. When I had time to look abroad I could see the white wash along our side, a short stretch of sea shining faintly gray in the starlight, and beyond that only the impenetrable dark. Now and then there appeared in the blackness a brilliant red spark that was instantaneously eclipsed : it was one of the enemy's guns firing, and there followed a thin wail overhead. Two or three times after we had fired I saw also in the blackness a blue flash followed by a tiny incandescent nebula that shone for an instant and disappeared : that was one of our shells hitting and making the steel where it hit glow white hot. After one shot a fire began to burn on one of the enemy's ships ; I could see its red heart and the tongues of flame, but all as tiny as if I were looking through the wrong end of a telescope. We fired half a dozen salvos in four or five minutes, and then we were silent. But the two cruisers behind us were still busy. Looking back I could just make out the slim bulk of the *Aurora* turning after us on our starboard quarter. From her starboard battery little points of red flame leapt out and stabbed the dark. When she fired

a shell with a night tracer in its base, a spark jumped away from her and seemed to glide off quite slowly into the night. Now that our own guns were silent, I could hear the noise that she and her followers were making. It is the most wonderful noise in the world, the noise of a warship's guns in action close at hand. On the open sea, with no land near to confuse the sound, it has a special resonance and intensity that is all its own. It comes in deafening claps of thunder, their quick succession and tremendous force eloquent of fury and defiance. "It is a dreadful and a majestic noise," I thought; "it is touching a nerve that no noise ever touched before—some nerve with a deep seat. Why is it so awfully magnificent? I think it is because one seems to hear speaking in that thunder the very voice of the great England of history. Of course that is the only way in which she could speak, the England of Drake and Nelson. It was in this very place, too, that she spoke with the same voice to the Spanish Armada. How glorious she is when one hears her great utterance proclaiming defiance to oppression!" and, as the guns thundered, a train of fine words tossed up by some freak of memory kept slipping over and over through my mind—"All honour, might, majesty, dominion, and glory."

The other cruisers ceased fire, and the battle was over; but we stayed at action stations until daylight, and twice before dawn we heard distant gunfire and went to look for it. It was the German destroyers in action with our other division of cruisers and with our destroyers, but both engagements were over before we came up. Just before dawn we came upon what looked

like an illuminated street—it was a long line of our destroyers showing their fighting lights as a guide to us and as a token that they were friends; and then when dawn broke we saw a sad sight—one of our destroyers with the whole of her bows gone, torn off right back to the bridge by a torpedo. Her fellows were circling round her like gulls round a wounded mate. It was impossible to tow her home; she was too badly injured. Her crew was taken off her, and the Commodore ordered her to be sunk. We steamed away, leaving two destroyers behind us to carry out the order. As we went their guns spoke, and after a shot or two the wreck disappeared very quietly from sight. It had to be done, but to see it gave one a tightening at the heart.

The strangest part of these adventures in the North Sea was after the battle to arrive back at our familiar buoy off Harwich pier, to change our clothes, and to go ashore to a tea-party at Dovercourt with friends whom we had seen at tea the day before. The two ways of life were so wholly unrelated to one another. When there was nothing all round us but gray water and beneath us only the slight fabric of the ship, alive and trembling, the dry land seemed an impossible dream, and ordinary ways and quiet days passed wholly from the mind. When a few hours later we found ourselves on the tennis-ground or amongst the pleasant woods on the Shotley side of the river, it was the sea that seemed an imaginary thing, and one could feel no special relation with the slim gray shape that was visible below there in the river. It was that variety that made us so much better off than the people in the Flow.

Every day, unless it was a "day on," the whole afternoon was free for "books and works and healthful play." At any moment, it was true, there might be a "general recall." That came if urgent business for the force turned up unexpectedly. All the ships in the harbour sounded their syrens together, making a noise to wake the dead, and everybody ashore must then speed to the jetty on the instant. The rule was that nobody must go out of sight of the ship or out of hearing of the syrens; but "general recalls" were rare, and sometimes, after a long spell of inactivity had bred a sense of security, we ventured on a walk into the country.

"Some bold adventurers disdain
The limits of their little reign,
And unknown regions dare descry.
Still as they run they look behind,
They hear a voice in every wind,
And snatch a fearful joy."

The moment, however, on our return when, just before the harbour came into sight, the thought dawned, "Can the thousandth chance have happened and the ships be gone?"—that was too fearful to be joyous, and it was very seldom that the limits were disdained.

As long as summer lasted Harwich was a pleasant place in which to be; but with the coming of the bitter east coast winter there came, too, a time of depression of spirits. I think that for many temporary adventurers the winter of 1916-17 was the worst time in all the war. For our military operations it was the darkest hour before the dawn: on every front things seemed to

be at a hopeless deadlock, and at sea everything was at a deadlock too. After two years the monotony of our occupation had begun to weigh upon us, and there was no hope of any release. Had I to say which was the worst moment in the war, I should choose one snowy night in February that, returning on board the ship, I walked down from Dovercourt to the Harwich pier past the railway lines, the gasworks, and the marsh, that are the cheerless scenery of this part of the town. But I was walking with the most cheerful man in the world, and knowing him to be so cheerful that I could safely bewail myself without risk of depressing him, I addressed him on the situation.

“How grim it is !” I said.

“The gasometer or the war ?”

“Both ! and particularly the war. It has gone on so long now that it has ceased to be an interesting diversion ; it has become a chapter of life and a very long one. How unfortunate is now the state of the temporary officer ! He has all the misfortunes that are common to all combatants, and in particular the unutterable boredom of a life of ‘standing by’—a boredom that as the months go on soaks into his bones and becomes a chronic ache in his brain and an itch in his muscles. But besides the common misfortunes he has some that are peculiarly his own. There is his long exile from his family and friends and from all his familiar haunts. I think that it is particularly hard for him to resign himself to that, because he did not expect it ; it was not in his forecast of life.”

“Yes ; it is rotten to be away now—this is the fighting season in the Fens.”

“ And soon the dog-mercury will be sprouting in the West Woods. It is perfectly rotten ! And then there is our work ! It is necessary work, but it is not the work of our choice. We have the worry of being unable to follow our own pursuits, of having to let them go hang, while we learn a profession of which the use to us is as temporary as our commissions. The war, on the other hand, is taking so long that we can no longer think of our temporary profession as a mere *tour de force* ; we have to think of it as the business of a substantial part of our lives, and then it becomes a worry to think that we suffer in this business from a handicap that we can never make good—we began too late, and we shall leave off too early. We must always be behind the regular officers in knowledge and experience, and we have no prospect of ever attaining to positions of much responsibility. We shall never be admirals or captains. It is all very well to be a makeshift for a time, but to be a permanent makeshift is very depressing.”

“ Cheer up ! the war can’t last for ever.”

“ It is having a good try ; and if and when it does end, what sort of world will there be for us to go back to ? Every day one hears of somebody that mattered having gone. The world to which we go back will be a different world from the good one that we left : it will be a poor world and an empty.”

“ Yes ; it is always the best that go,” said my companion. “ I should hate to be dead, but certainly it would be good company to be in.”

We fell to discussing death, and when, soon after, he joined that good company, I remembered what he said, finding words for what was, I think, a common

frame of mind in those days. He said that before the war people made much too much of a fuss about death, and that was because death was a stranger to them, surrounded with a frightening mystery. But on the closer acquaintance that came with the war the mystery vanished, and death became a commonplace fact. When one went out to meet him daily, his importance was soon reduced to its right proportions in relation to the other facts of life, and one found that it was not really very great. One found that dying did not matter a bit in comparison with living; that the only thing that really mattered was to get the most intense being that one could out of every moment of life; and that it would make nonsense of things to allow oneself to be deterred from that by the danger of losing one's life.

"It does seem nonsense," I said. "Not to be as alive as one can be is to let oneself die. So to be deterred by the fear of death from the performance, for instance, of some exacting duty which calls for the exercise of all one's powers would be to let oneself die in order to avoid being killed."

"Yes," he said—"or to let oneself become half dead; and anything is better than being half alive."

"But what I complain about in this existence is that most of the time half alive is just what one is." But he decided that we had changed the subject, and as we were arriving at the jetty where our boat was waiting for us, there was no time to begin a fresh lamentation.

It was a dismal winter, the most dismal of the four, and except our fight on January 23rd no incidents came to break its monotony. We cruised over to the Scheldt and up to Terschelling and back again, and we walked

ashore in the rain through the cheerless suburbs on the hill, and we tramped up and down the quarter-deck on our "days on," until any spark of novelty or interest in life became a pleasure almost too keen to be borne. It will be remembered that it was a very late winter and that there were April snows, but at last the pussy-willows on the banks of the river began to break into their balls of yellow down, and the spring was come.

When I look back at that springtime I find that what is stamped most deeply on my memory is not either of our rare battles but the dark affair of the chronometers. The recollection of that preys upon my secret thoughts. Nobody has ever yet heard about it, and even now I hardly dare to tell the tale ; but it is said that confession brings peace of mind, so I will make a clean breast of it, regardless of the ignominy, and I will hope that if these pages ever come to the dreaded eye of the navigator a victorious peace may be considered to have brought with it an amnesty for such crimes.

It was one of my duties to wind the chronometers. There were three of them, and they lived in a mahogany chest in a flat far forward ; one got to the flat by squeezing through a hatch and clambering down a ladder. To the outward eye they were just three round brass clocks ; but to the inward eye of the Service they were three tribal gods, to be worshipped at all times, and to be served once a day according to prescribed rites and ceremonies. According to tradition the navigator is ever their high priest, and the junior officer who assists him is their acolyte. Daily at nine o'clock the sergeant of marines, to whom the duty is assigned by immemorial

custom, approaches the acolyte and says, "Chronometers wound, sir!" The acolyte then proceeds to the sanctuary and unlocks the case. First he checks their time-keeping. With waving forefinger and a solemn counting he observes how their second-hands are keeping step, and having thus discovered the fraction of a second which each has gained or lost since the day before, he calculates the rate at which each is gaining or losing, and enters his observations in a register. Next, taking each in turn reverently between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, he twists it over on its swivels, inserts a key into its back, and gives the key a prescribed number of turns. Lastly, after removing any specks of dust with a clean silk handkerchief, he relocks the case, and the service is over for the day. On the high seas chronometers are necessary to navigation, although they are not so necessary now as they used to be in the days before wireless telegraphy. When out in the Atlantic, for instance, it is essential for a navigator to have good chronometers, always going at a known rate. If they were ever to stop he would be in a very awkward predicament, and the whole of the established ritual is designed to make it impossible that they ever should stop. It has lasted so long, so many generations of seamen have grown up in the faith that the winding of the chronometers is the first duty of man, that to the good seaman the idea of their stoppage is unthinkable. One might say "when the chronometers stop" instead of "when the world comes to an end," but that it would not be thought a very seemly phrase. In such narrow waters, however, as those in which the *Centaur* spent her time chronometers are not of much practical importance.

The ship is never long out of sight of some recognizable fixed object, and it is from such objects that the navigator gets his position. In the *Centaur* the chronometers were little used ; but, used or not used, the traditional ritual had to be maintained. It is so deeply imbedded in the minds of seamen that I believe were the sea to dry up and were all ships to come to rest for ever, a thousand years hence the chronometers would still be wound daily, and anthropologists would be speculating upon the origin of the curious folk-custom.

It will, then, be understood that when I was appointed acolyte of the chronometers, and charged with the duty of winding them, I felt that the burden of my responsibility was tremendous. Perhaps the very depth of the impression that it made upon me contributed to my downfall by making me nervous. But I would not seek to persuade the world that my crime was one of those hysterical acts that come of long brooding. Certainly the perversity is well known that makes the one thing above all others that one must not do the one thing above all others that one wants to do ; but it was not thus that I fell. The tempter found a simpler and more insidious means for my undoing. *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*, and it was little by little that I was led aside from the narrow path. The chronometers are wound every day ; but to make assurance doubly sure, to guard against some convulsion of nature that might prevent them from being wound at the proper time, they are made to run for forty-eight hours. It was the twenty-four hours' grace that led to my downfall. For six months all went well, and then a morning came when the sergeant said, " Chronometers wound, sir ! " and I

did not arise straightway and go to the forward flat. I was very comfortable where I was, and had I not still a whole twenty-four hours in which to do the winding? I did not do it that day until 10.30 a.m., and that was my first downward step. *Facilis descensus*—the spell of nine o'clock once broken, I soon thought little of not winding them until lunch time, until tea time, until dinner time even. Ah, had I only arisen that day and gone straightway to the forward flat!

So for three months or so matters went from bad to worse, until at last I was doubtful sometimes whether I had wound the chronometers at all, and I had to get up again after I had turned into my bunk in order to make sure. And then at last the evil one decided that it was time for his *coup*. The evil one? or was it the brazen gods themselves that did it, incensed by the irregularities in their service? At eight o'clock one morning there came a sudden order that we were to go to sea at once. Nine o'clock passed in the hurry of unexpected preparations. After we had started we were told that we were certain to be back before midnight. "I will wind them up then," I thought. At midnight we were coming into harbour, when we suddenly turned round and went out to sea again. Soon afterwards we went to action stations. Something exciting was expected, and all that night and all next morning we were on the alert and much preoccupied. Finally we got back to harbour at 3 p.m. next day. I had come off the bridge and gone aft to my cabin when a horrid thought struck me like a thunderbolt. I ran forward to the flat, unlocked the case with trembling hands, and stood turned to stone. The chronometers had stopped!

I know what a murderer feels like, a murderer who confronts three corpses, his own children, with their innocent little faces all in a row. He thinks, "I have dreamed this before; now one wakes up." Then when he cannot wake up he appeals to them wildly: "Oh, do come to life again! You know I didn't go for to do it!"

But the chronometers sat silent with never a tick; and now comes the darkest page of this confession. With my eyes glued to the corpses I sat and gnawed my finger nails for a while, and before I had gnawed them for very long I knew that I was not going to own up. I arose and set deliberately to work to conceal the evidences of my crime. Nothing could make the chronometers have not stopped, but could they not be set going again so as to prevent detection? I locked them up in their box and went and got the chronometer manual. Back in my cabin with the key of the case and of its fatal secret safe in my pocket, I sat and pored over the manual far into the night. My wits were sharpened by the instinct of self-preservation into an acute understanding of mechanical complexities that is not their normal state. I realized that if one could restart each chronometer at the exact time of the next day at which it would have shown the hour now appearing on its dead face if it had never died, that would conceal all traces of the stoppage, and I found that the only way to start a chronometer was to take it out of its case, to wind it up, and to give it a sharp twist. Bracing my nerves to the ordeal of gazing once more upon my handiwork, I went and found out what time was shown by each dead face, and I worked out the hour at which

each must be started next day. What apprehensions filled my mind until the hour came ! I pictured the navigator passing the case, with his hearing quickened by the angel of retribution, and instantly noticing the absence of the vital tick. Next day, when the time was near, I stole down to the flat, and, stop-watch in hand, gave successfully to two of the corpses the resuscitating twist. There was an hour to wait before I could start the third, and when I came back to do it there was a seaman sitting near the case mending his trousers. I do not suppose that he would have noticed what I was about or that he would have understood it if he had noticed ; but a guilty conscience shuns even an unsuspecting eye, and I fled, to bear the burden of my secret for twelve hours more. During those twelve hours I suffered pangs of mingled apprehension and remorse, by which the chronometers were well avenged. In the small hours of the next night the third chronometer got its twist, and I breathed again.

The crime was now concealed, but not wholly. However careful I might be I could not get them started at exactly the right second. They were all a few seconds wrong, and the error of those few seconds appeared in the register. If it were noticed it would very likely let the cat out of the bag ; but it was unlikely that it would be noticed, since the register is not light reading, and is not widely read. I felt that I could be fairly easy in my mind, and the future showed that I was right. The discrepancy in the register never was noticed ; and as the days passed the turmoil of my afflicted conscience slowly subsided, and I found in meticulous punctuality at nine o'clock some ease from

the pangs of undetected guilt. But there that damning discrepancy of a second or two has been ever since crying out against me from the register. How many years now has its menace been ringing in my inward ear? At last all is known, and I need fear it never again. As I finish my confession a great peace steals into my heart.

There came once more the exhilaration of action. The dawn of May 9th (1917) found us steering south-east about forty miles north-west of Zeebrugge. There were two light cruisers following us, and six of our destroyers were in line ahead on our starboard quarter at three or four thousand yards' distance. The day broke bright and clear, and at 4 a.m. we perceived a line of eleven German destroyers steaming westward on our starboard bow; they were coming out of Zeebrugge, probably for a raid on the Dutch traffic. We started off at full speed, altering course to south in order to try to intercept them. They held their course for a little, and then they made up their minds that they did not like the look of us, and made off back to Zeebrugge. I expect that they thought at first that we were all destroyers, and that they turned as soon as they identified the light cruisers. But meanwhile we had got within range of them, and both sides opened fire. They were then about 12,000 yards away on our starboard beam, and they were steaming on a course parallel to ours. Their first salvos dropped all round us at a surprisingly long range for their smaller guns; but they could go much faster than we could, and soon we were out of their range. They did not seem, however, to appreciate

that, and they kept on firing away at us and dropping everything short. We continued to chase and to fire for an hour. By then they had drawn just out of our range, and since we were within twenty miles of Zeebrugge and amongst enemy mine-fields, the Commodore turned the cruisers away. Our destroyers continued the chase until one of them was hit by a shore battery, and then they followed us out. We made several hits, but we did not succeed in stopping anything. The enemy did not hit us at all.

I had come down from the top at 2 a.m., and camped on a deck-chair in the Commodore's lobby in the superstructure. I had an idea that there must be something in the air, because we were steaming at twenty-five knots, which was much faster than our ordinary pace at night. I established myself in the lobby, because one could not get any sleep right aft in my cabin when we were going at that speed, and because in the lobby I was separated from my No. 4 gun by two steps only and a jump up the ladder. There was a pleasantly subdued light in the lobby, and it was blessedly quiet there in comparison with the cabins; and there is always a comfortable sense of security in being on a level with the upper deck. We had been having a hard time with several nights out, and in a few minutes I fell fast asleep, and slept so soundly that I did not wake when the rattlers sounded. But presently I woke up with a vague sense that something was going on, and I went out on deck rubbing my eyes. I stumbled over a hose pipe that was spouting water, and a seaman doubled past me looking like a white mummy in his anti-flash clothes. "Action!" that said, and I leapt up the

ladder to No. 4 just in time to get off the first salvo. This time there was no uncertainty about what we were firing at. There were the enemy destroyers, clearly visible as black dots on the sparkling waves, far away to starboard. Our own destroyers were rushing along to get between us and them, from a little behind us. They were making a furious chase of it, the four of them after the eleven Germans. A destroyer is always the embodiment of speed, and now to an eye excited by the emotions of action they seemed to fly over the water amongst the cut and curling waves faster than any mortal thing ever moved before. The *Stork* was their leader. They were firing an occasional shot only, as much as to say, "No time for this yet, but wait!" The cruisers behind us were firing intermittently too. We with our bigger armament were making most of the noise. Our gunnery now was well worked up, and our salvos were certainly beautiful. I had not thought that we could shoot so quickly; our five guns went off in the director salvos all together, and every time like one gun. Looking along the ship I could see the five muzzles reaching upwards and outwards, and bellowing and leaping together backwards and forwards with the speed and regularity of clockwork. The enemy also was controlling his fire well. I could see the flashes run from end to end of his line in a pretty ripple. "Where are his shells going?" I wondered. "I don't see them." And then I noticed that between us and him, and not less than five hundred yards away from us, a lot of gray ghosts were rearing themselves from the sea, and wavering and fading: they were the splashes from his "shorts." Now and then something went by

overhead saying "Burra-wurra!"—it was a ricochet. Soon the enemy made a smoke screen, and was lost to sight in a long, dirty smudge into which we continued to fire. He dropped big smoke bombs also, which made such a cloud on the sea that some of our destroyers wasted time and ammunition in shooting at them, under the impression that they were enemy ships set on fire and stopped. The fight while it lasted was like the old days of hard pounding; it was an hour's sheer dripping sweat to get the guns off fast enough. The ammunition came leaping up the hoist with a clank and a thump on to the deck, and it was all that they could do down below to hoist it up fast enough. The breech-pads swelled with the heat, and we had to put two or three hands on the levers in order to get the breeches open and shut. On No. 5 we used up two of the electrical firing circuits, and we had arrived at the third before we ceased fire. The rammer-numbers got so tired that they had to be relieved, and before the end the sweating loaders could hardly lift the heavy shells.

Zeebrugge sent seaplanes to bomb us as we went home, which missed us with their bombs almost as badly as we missed them with our anti-aircraft guns, and three hours after ceasing fire we were walking up Harwich High Street on our way to the tennis club.

A month later the *Centaur* had her fourth battle in company with the Harwich force. It was in the same place, and in every other way almost an exact repetition of the engagement of 9th May, save that on this occasion good fortune gave us what then it had denied. One of our shots found the engine-room of an enemy destroyer. Her speed was reduced, and our destroyers

caught and sank her. That was a good stroke, but it seemed as if it were to be our last. Zeebrugge learnt from the sharp experience, and no longer sent destroyers out except on the darkest of nights. Deep peace settled upon us; an occasional trip over to the Scheldt and back in order to escort the Dutch beef boats was all that there was left for us to do. The Commodore had taken the bread out of his own mouth; his unwearying vigilance had taught the enemy to stay at home, and there was nobody left for him to fight.

I consoled myself with this reflection when at the beginning of July I found that I was to make once more what I had come to think of as my annual move. For a year now Kerr, of Serbian fame, had been in command of a group of big naval guns on the front in Flanders. There was a vacancy for an officer there, and I was to fill it. I had one more cruise with the *Centaur*, a dash over to the Dutch coast, during which we captured and drove ashore five or six German merchant vessels that were trying to steal round from the Hook to Germany; and then one morning I found myself in khaki again, and sitting on my bag on the deck of the *Broke* on my way from Dover to Dunkerque. The future was full of interest. To all of us engaged on other fronts the Western Front had always been "the real war." Elsewhere one had an uneasy feeling that in comparison with those who were carrying on that tremendous struggle one was little better than an *embusqué*. It would be very unpleasant on the Western Front, but there was a compensating sense of satisfaction in being about at last to know the worst.

CHAPTER IV.

NIEUPOORT BAINS—THE ROYAL NAVAL SIEGE GUNS.

AN organization so widespread and so enterprising as the Navy is apt to overflow its natural limits, and that, I think, was the true and only reason for the existence of British naval guns in Flanders during the war. In the early days of the war, when the Germans were thrusting along the coast, the Navy, being on the spot, came to the help of the hard-pressed army by landing big guns and their crews ; and once landed they stayed. Otherwise there was no special reason why there should have been naval guns on the coast section of the front rather than on any other part of it. Certainly they made an impressive addition to the end of the line there ; but in truth, after the enemy's first rush had been stopped and trench warfare had begun, the geographical end of the line had not much strategical importance. The neck of dune and fen which lies between the inundations of Dixmude and the sea is too narrow for a modern army to thrust through. The region of Ypres is the first in which there is a front wide enough for operations on a large scale, and it was there that the struggle for the coast was decided. But the Navy loves a run ashore, and having got a foot planted on the dunes it took care to keep it there.

The Royal Naval Siege Guns, so called although they had nothing to do with sieges, consisted of older 9.2-inch guns with a short range, and modern 7.5-inch guns with a longer range. They were manned partly by the Navy, partly by marines, and partly, for lack of naval ratings, by the Royal Garrison Artillery. They were placed amongst the regular heavy artillery of the army in positions along the coast, and their functions were the usual functions of any other heavy artillery. There was nothing particularly naval in their work ; they fought the German heavy artillery ashore in the ordinary way. In tactical matters, and in all that concerned the daily work of shooting, both groups were under the orders of the military. For administration and supply they were under the orders of the British Commodore at Dunkerque, and through him of the Admiral at Dover. But Dunkerque did not in fact have very much to say to them, and Dover still less ; they lived and worked with the army authorities, an *imperium in imperio*.

Kerr was in charge of a group of four of the old 9.2's, monstrous bottle-shaped things that fired shells weighing 350 pounds and half as high as a man. Two of his guns were about a mile and a half from the line ; the other two were quite close up to it and within a thousand yards of the Germans. These last two lived in concrete emplacements which were christened Barrington and Eastney. Barrington was my charge ; Eastney was in charge of a marine officer, Lieutenant Baseby, D.S.C., and later, Lieutenant Husey. Kerr, the marine officer and I had our quarters in a dug-out situated 150 yards to one side of the gun-pits, and the crews, consisting of fifteen seamen for Barrington and fifteen marines for

Eastney, lived in dug-outs near by. We were at the very end of the great line ; the beach was two hundred yards away, and the rare silences were made more noticeable by the murmur of the waves. All around us were dunes of loose sand, bound together by bents and sculptured by the wind into mountains, valleys and plains. In the heats of summer we were tormented by clouds of mosquitoes, and in the winter gales by blown sand. Our dug-out was in a sand ridge, with its entrance on a level with the bottom of a saucer-shaped hollow in the dunes, and on the other side of the hollow rose the mound of sand that covered Barrington. Lewin Camp the place was called, after its first commanding officer—a settlement of burrows in a sand desert, that might have been the habitation of some pariah folk more primitive than the Troglodytes.

It was in this settlement that for nine months we lived together that strange life which millions lived for years during the war, the life of shells. At home the weather affects our lives with an all-pervading influence ; in Flanders the shell-weather exercised an influence comparable in its pervasion of all things but intensified in proportion to the difference between a shell and a drop of rain. When it was fine shell-weather we could go for a walk and run the risk of a shower ; when it was foul we stayed closely at home in the dug-out, and if one of us had to go out he ran as fast as he could from shelter to shelter, and hunched his shoulders against the storm. We sat, slept, and breathed in an atmosphere of shell-fire which gave us so much to think about that we had no thoughts left for anything else. Those days are seen now in the lurid light shed on them by

the state of intense consciousness which is the result of living under fire. Every feature of the all too familiar ground, every trivial incident that happened there, seems one of the great facts of the world, because in every feature and every incident there was involved, half realized but ever present, the issue between life and death.

When a visitor came to see us, if it was fair shell-weather we took him up a little peak of dune in front in order to show him the view, crawling on hands and knees for the last few feet so as not to show ourselves on the sky-line. If the reader will imagine himself to be a visitor for a few moments I will show the view to him also. He is lying, then, at full length on the crest of the dune, peering forward between the bents, and the mosquitoes are biting the back of his neck. Behind him and below are our dug-outs in the hollow by a cross-road; all that he can see of them is the chequered pattern of sand-bags and square black holes in the gray sides of the sand ridge. A quarter of a mile away to his left front, and along the beach, there is a line of tumbled and shattered buildings which is the ruined sea-terrace of Nieuport Bains, the place at which I used to look last year when I was patrolling the net-barrier in the *Aurora*. At the far end of the row of ruins there is a gray waste of broken brick and timber—that is the ill-famed district of Hurlebise; and beyond it, by the wooden jetty at the mouth of the Yser Canal, is the well-known Barrel Post, the actual end of the front. There is a thumping going on over there and clouds of dust are jumping up into the air. The Germans are shelling Hurlebise with trench mortars; but it is all

right—we are out of range of a trench mortar. From Barrel Post the canal runs across in front of us and a thousand yards away to where, a couple of miles to the right, amidst the bare stumps of trees, we can see the riven fragments of Nieuport. There is Barrington, close behind the crest of the dune, an innocent-looking hillock. The black square of its embrasure is hidden from aircraft by a stretched cloth, but the camouflage is really for the look of the thing only; Barrington and Eastney are far too big and too close up to have any chance of escaping detection, and the Germans have long known all about them. Behind Barrington, and on the other side of a road, the *route Aeolienne*, there is a big mass of dune, the highest in sight; that is *Côte 27*, or Broken Hill, a name familiar to the gunners of three armies. It looks deserted enough, but it is as teeming with hidden life as is an ant-hill. It is honeycombed with tunnels, and every tuft of bents that we see hides an opening into a little chamber where, glasses at eyes, sits an observer for the heavy artillery. Here, where we are, it is the zone of the field guns; there is a battery of them a few hundred yards away on the right and hidden behind the ridges of sand, the first of a line of field-gun batteries which is as long as the front. They are not firing just now, but from between us and the ruins of Nieuport Bains there comes a hollow and resonant coughing like the coughing of a cow. It is a battery of field howitzers, those hard-working little people. A howitzer was there that had fired 20,000 rounds and was still in very good order when it was smashed by a direct hit. The belt of dunes along the sea is not more than three-quarters of a mile wide here. Be-

yond the gray ridges of the sand are the dark green levels of the marshy polder, and along the edge of the polder runs the chief communication way of these parts, Blighty Avenue. It is a covered wooden passage with earth heaped against it on both sides as a protection against splinters. It joins the *route Aeolienne* there where the road runs out into the polder at Suicide Corner. Everybody knows Suicide Corner and avoids it if he can, because the enemy shells it whenever he has nothing better to do. He is just beginning to shell it now with a 5.9-inch howitzer, and clods of earth are jumping into the air all round the crossing. After that he often shells our own cross-road. The kicking rattle that has just begun close in front of us is one of our machine guns ; it is sitting in a fold of the dunes turned right up into the air and spraying bullets on to some German line of communication. Indirect machine-gun fire of that sort is horrid ; you get no warning and do not know what is hitting you or whence it is coming. We get some of it here. The authorities were sceptical when we first reported it to them ; but one night, when we were rolling sand barrows along a line of planks, there came a whit ! whit ! whit ! and in the morning we found a row of bullet holes all along one of the planks ; so that proved it. That shriek which makes us all duck is a 5.9-inch howitzer shell ; but it is well over us and to one side. It was meant for the 60-pounders, I think ; but perhaps we may as well go back to the dug-out, where our visitor will refresh himself with a glass of Navy rum, that sombre and glorious liquor the unusual plenty of which here is one of our consolations. He will be none the worse for it, because things seem to be

getting noisy. The field guns have wakened up all round us with reverberating thuds ; there was a crash and a volcano just now rather close in front, and they have just put a couple of 4-inch shells from a high-velocity gun on to the road by the *Laiterie*, a shattered house half a mile down the coast road, behind which the visitor's car is waiting.

Such was the lie of the line on our piece of the front ; and whilst I was there it had a very simple history—it never changed. Early in July 1917 the English Fourth Army had taken over this, the coastal section, from the French. The enemy, in order to anticipate an expected attack, or because on the German-British fronts there was always more virulence than on the German-French, thereupon made an attack himself and took from us a strip of ground that we were holding on the far side of the canal. The canal itself thus became the front for the two miles from Nieuport to the sea, and it remained so until our victorious line advanced in 1918. During the autumn of 1917 we heard, not far away in the south, the incessant rumblings of the Passchendaele attacks, but on our own front there was no movement. During the first months of the British Fourth Army's stay on the coast, in August and September (1917), we made great preparations for an attack. A tremendous force of heavy artillery was concentrated in the dunes behind us, and countless field guns assembled all around us. All night, and every night, strings of giant guns came up the coast road and rolled away to hide themselves amongst the dunes. I saw one evening a row of fourteen 6-inch howitzers waiting in a discreet place on the road until

the dark should enable them to steal up into position. We began then to carry out the artillery programme which precedes a grand attack. We had P-day, and Q-day, and R-day, and all the days up to and including Y-day, and there remained only Z-day, the day of the attack itself. Rumour said that the attack was to be supported by a landing on the coast beyond the canal, and I thought of some immensely long lighters that I had seen in the docks at Chatham when the *Centaur* was refitting there, which I had been warned were a great secret. I wondered whether they were for use in the landing, and I thought that I should be sorry to be in anything that went to make a landing in the face of the German defences of the Belgian coast. But after Y-day, when we were all awaiting the orders for Z-day on the tiptoe of expectation, nothing happened. A day passed, and another day, and still no orders came for the expected Z-day; and when a whole week had passed without anything special happening we realized that the attack was "off."

After the preparations for an attack were over our front fell back into a state of "normal trench warfare" and of artillery duels. As long as the British Fourth Army was with us there was great activity, and the enemy had decidedly the worst of it. But in October the British left, and the French came back again and brought with them comparative peace. Lastly, in February of 1918, the Belgians replaced the French, so first and last we served at Lewin under the heavy artillery commanders of three nations. The British, I should say, had much the best guns and many more of them; but the French had the best system. While

we were under the British there was a plague of paper work ; every day brought its great thought from one headquarters or another, and the time that it took to consider and to answer it was sometimes spent usefully, but more often not. The day that the French " took over " the rain of paper stopped dead, and their gunnery, if allowance be made for the inferiority of their materials, was certainly as good as that of the British, if not better.

I believe that no one who was not a temporary officer in the war can realize the rapture that it was after long service in subordinate positions to have " a show of one's own." If one has ever tasted responsibility in even the smallest and most diluted doses one gets a craving for it, and deprivation of it causes as much discomfort as deprivation of his alcohol causes to a drunkard. After a period of enforced abstinence it is an inexpressible relief to have some again ; boredom and lassitude vanish, and life becomes worth living. When Kerr first took me over to Barrington and said, " This is your show," it seemed like heaven. Just then the petty officer came up for next day's orders. " Do you want the crew to-morrow afternoon ? " said Kerr. " If not, I want a sanding-party for the dug-outs." I pondered deeply, said that I might manage to spare them, and swelled like a peacock. But walking back to the dug-out I felt that it was all again a little like the dream in which one is a great *virtuoso* about to play Bach's *Chaconne*, and yet does not know one end of a fiddle from the other. " There is that great gun sitting down there in its dark pit like an elephant in a trap. I have no idea how one aims it, or when, or at what. It is shore gunnery, and

how should I know ? It is extraordinary in the Navy ; for a long time everybody assumes that one knows nothing, not even the multiplication table, and then one goes to Whale Island or somewhere, there is a click, and everybody assumes that one knows everything. I had better tell Kerr that I do not know anything, before he finds it out for himself."

"Kerr, I do not know anything about shore gunnery."

"Oh, it is as easy as falling off a log. You have been to Whale Island, have you not ?"

"Yes ; but what about identifying targets, and ranges, and bearings, here ashore, and all that ?"

"I will show you. There is nothing in it ; you get them from the map and allow for the error of the day, and there you are !"

"Kerr, what is the error of the day ?"

Kerr looked down his nose and said that it was the daily error ; he would show me ; but it did not make a tremendous lot of difference anyhow. The great thing was to get the pieces off on the nail and to make a cheerful noise in order to encourage the infantry. The observers would "spot you on."

There was nothing for it but to learn what had to be learned as quickly as possible. To help one there was in the first place Kerr's genius for practical gunnery. Nobody but he could do much with our worn-out old bottle guns ; but he, by his feeling for their little personal peculiarities, could make them shoot quite accurately. In the second place, there was the genius for theoretical gunnery of Hollingsworth (of Harrow), who was with the 12-inch guns behind. To reckon

by time, he too was a beginner in the science; but he had taken to it as naturally as a duck takes to water, and he had already an easy mastery of it which was of the greatest benefit to all the Siege Guns and their gunners. With Kerr's help and Hollingsworth's it did not take long to learn the little that one needed to know. At first it was an anxious responsibility to fire the elephant and to send a big shell upon its way; but as soon as familiarity had removed the anxiety it was very exhilarating. The big shell was going over to the Germans, who had sent so many of them over to us, here and on the Danube.

Barrington, for nine months the object of all my affections—my “show,” that occupied my thoughts by day and my dreams by night—was a barrow like the barrows upon the downs at home. It was larger, and it was covered, not with sweet, short turf full of harebells and thyme, but with sand and bits of broken shell. But it had the same nature and object: it was a mound built in order to conceal and to protect a chamber. The chamber was a concrete box as big as a large room that had been sunk for half its depth into the sand. In the upper part of its front side a square hole was left as an embrasure. The great gun sat on its revolving pedestal at the bottom of the chamber and looked upwards over a sill and out through the hole. Concrete wings ran forward from the embrasure in order to hold back the sand of the mound. The roof of the chamber was made of iron rails with four feet of concrete on top of them. There were two narrow passages of wood running at right angles out of the chamber on each side. Those in front were blind and led to small magazine

chambers ; those behind turned back at their ends and gave access by steps to bolt-holes which led into the outer air. In one of the rear passages was a bay for shells, and a well ; in the other was a recess with a table and a telephone, and this was my post as battery commander. Over the whole structure of chambers and passages sand was heaped, as much sand as could be got to stay on the top of it. Over the middle of the gun chamber, which was the weakest place, there were sixteen feet of sand ; over the ends of the passages and nearer the sides of the barrow there were not more than ten feet. The magazine chambers and my post were lit by electric batteries and tiny glow lamps that usually succumbed when the gun fired.

Indeed, when Barrington fired it was an affair, and the whole neighbourhood knew about it. The 9.2's were too big to be used for ordinary bread-and-butter work ; they were usually called in for special tasks only. We are sitting in our dug-out after lunch, it may be, and it is bad shell-weather. The enemy has a mistaken but fixed idea that there is a gun position behind the peak of the dune outside, and he is paying it one of his occasional attentions, on this occasion with a couple of big 8-inch howitzers. Most of the shells are falling in the saucer between us and Barrington. We can hear them coming a mile off, and they fall and burst with the effect of a volcanic eruption that makes deep craters in the sand. Our dug-out can stand a great deal ; the ordinary 5.9's can patter on the top of it like rain, and give us trouble only in replacing the sand. It would not, however, stand one of these 8-inch things. We are just off the line of fire, and we have a good deal of con-

fidence in the German gunners, but some of the worse shots are coming very close to us. One falls in a puddle ten yards from our door; there is a shower of water and sand on top of the dug-out; the anti-gas blankets are split; and the door jumps open. It occurs to each of the three of us in turn that he has some business to take him into the inner dug-out, which is Kerr's sleeping cabin. There is better head-cover over that. We are all rather elaborately unconscious of what is going on—all, that is, except Kerr, who does not count, because nature made him indifferent to shell-fire. When he is outside and a shell comes by his head he does not duck. The natural man does duck when a shell comes by his head, with an instinctive and quite involuntary reaction, and that shows that Kerr is unnatural about shell-fire. The example of this indifference of his has set a fashion at Lewin. Elsewhere they may run about and duck when a shell comes; at Lewin you may get out of the way if you can, but if you cannot you are expected to preserve an air, at least, of complete abstraction. The trick of it does not come easily, but under Kerr's cold eye it comes, and it is very good for *moral* at such a time as this. When a man has to sit still under the fire of big guns, if he allows himself to think too much about it, he soon becomes not at his best. There is a temptation to occupy himself with nice calculations where the next shell is going—is the fellow sweeping to the right and on to us? or was that last shift an accident only? He finds himself estimating exactly how much the head-cover will stand, and what will be the manner of its crumpling up if the next shell hits it. To worry about such things tires the nerves, crows a

man, and makes him excitable ; and to avoid such worryings and to help one to keep a healthy and collected frame of mind there is nothing like having a cold eye upon one that makes it necessary to suppress all outward signs of agitation. It stiffens one, as it were, from the surface inward.

Between one crump and another the telephone rings, and our own headquarters speak. " I say, Lewin, will you stand by to open fire on N.X. 3, please ? They are shelling Swiftsure (a battery), and we want to shut them up." No need to look up ranges : N.X. 3 is Barrington's most familiar foe, one of a pair of 11-inch howitzers that lives about eight thousand yards from here, and near Westende Bains. Photographs taken from aeroplanes show that they are placed in deep pits, and that they shoot up through holes in the roof, so that they are very hard to hit with a gun like ours that fires with a flat trajectory. Kerr presses the alarm bell to the men's dug-out, and I seize notebooks and gas mask and make for the door. Crump ! comes another eight-inch right in the middle of the saucer between us and Barrington. There are only a hundred yards to go to that desired haven, but it seems a long way. I can see the crew coming over the sand ridge, and waiting, like me, for a chance to cross to the pit. On these occasions it is prudent to wait a little in order to notice the rhythm of the firing before one starts to cross. After a round or two one can tell with some certainty how many guns are shooting, and how fast, and then one starts off immediately a shell has arrived, in what one calculates to be the longest interval obtainable. The first seaman who starts for his bolt misjudges his time, and he and an

8-inch shell arrive in the middle of the saucer together. He vanishes in a fountain of sand and black fumes. We shall have to pick up the bits ; but no ! ten seconds later he comes into sight again as he scrambles out of an old shell-crater, choking and swearing. He tumbled down into it when he heard the shell coming, and that is the best thing to do, but it does not save one from some bad seconds while one wonders whether the coming shell may not choose the same hole. Now is our time ! and half a dozen of us start for our sprint through the deep sand in heavy boots. I have read in some silly newspaper that it is not *etiquette* in the British Army to run in order to avoid shells. My own observations do not confirm that statement. At any rate it is quite *etiquette* to do so in the British Navy. We run like hares, while the fortunate two who can stay in the blessed dug-out give a derisive cheer. The sand is tossed into mounds and holes ; it is all blackened and stained with the explosions, and the air is thick with fumes. We stumble about and arrive at the other side of the danger zone breathless and choking. Crump ! comes another close behind, and we squeeze through the low entrance and tumble down the dark steps into Barrington with the most affectionate feeling for its massive security.

Four hands stagger from the shell-passage bearing a shell slung between them on a bar. I set the clinometer on the breech, and the gray monster stirs in the shadows, raising its head until the tiny bubble of the clinometer comes to rest, and swinging itself a little from side to side. Back at the telephone in the passage I tell Kerr that we are ready. I can hear our head-

quarters warning the observers miles away, "Barrington about to fire." "Barrington fire!" says Kerr, and "Fire!" I call to the gun. The crew are all in the passage, and out of the gun chamber; our own blast is wellnigh unbearable in that enclosed space, and they are exposed there to splinters when an enemy shell falls near the embrasure. A hand pulls the long lanyard, and there is a majestic tonk! and a chromatic whoop. The blast of the discharge hits us down the passage with the force of a painful kick, our eyes and lungs are filled with fumes and flying sand, and all the lights go out. I seize the telephone—"Barrington fired." "I heard you," says Kerr; they heard us all over the section, and thought, "There is a 9.2; capital! it will distract attention from us." There is a minute's pause while the observers make their reports and the officer in the distant spotting office does some lightning manipulation with a ruler, and then I hear Kerr's voice down the telephone, "Up one hundred, right five"—not half bad for an opening shot; I think that we are going to have a good shoot. But, however that may be, we are not going to have it all our own way. We have fired three rounds only, when there is a distant murmur that swells into a shrieking roar overhead, and ends in a crash like the end of the world on the *route Aeolienne*, fifty yards behind the pit; something big—"11-inch, sir," says the petty officer with the correct air of detachment. It must be N.X. 4, N.X. 3's twin, come to his help. Well, it shows that we are vexing them, and sand is magnificent head cover. Barrington can stand even these big ones as long as two of them do not arrive in the same place. There is certainly the chance that one

may fall in the embrasure ; that would hurt ; but it is a small chance. Now it is a regular zigzag duel : N.X. 3 is shooting at Swiftsure, we at N.X. 3, and N.X. 4 at us. I hope to goodness Counter-battery will turn some one on to N.X. 4. We are firing shot for shot ; our mighty tonk and the yell and crash of the arriving 11-inch come in regular alternation. One feels that it is really a stand-up fight, and it is seldom that a heavy gunner has that satisfaction. N.X. 4 has got our range quickly. The next yell ends in a thud overhead ; that is one on top. After the next there is a rattle and crash and a noise of falling earth at the end of the shell passage. " This here passage is stove in," comes in an aggrieved voice from the dark in that direction. It means several days' hard work for the voice in rebuilding it. The enemy is being tiresome ; but so, I hope, are we. We are now making small corrections only between the rounds. Kerr is on his target, and he is feeling gently about in order to see if we can drop a shell into the hole through which N.X. 3 shoots. After a few more rounds on top of us that knock off an amount of sand that it will take a week to replace, N.X. 4 shortens, and things become very unpleasant, because now his shells are falling just in front of our embrasure. When one falls there splinters come flying in, and the gun chamber is totally obscured for a moment by a cloud of black smoke and sand hanging in the embrasure. There is another cause for the obscurity. The marines are making a smoke screen for us in order to worry the German observers, and dense white clouds are rolling across the ridge of dune in front of us. It is unpleasant work for them out there in the open with all this going on, and we are much obliged to them. Nor

is it pleasant in the gun chamber, loading and laying the gun with 11-inch shells bursting within a few yards of the big embrasure. We do not waste time in getting the gun ready and in skipping out into the passages at the side. But the crew are no novices ; some of them have been doing this work for nearly two years, and they stand the strain well. There is a louder crash and a harder shake than ever : one has fallen right on the sill of the embrasure. Luckily the crew are all in the passages, and the fragments of shell and the blocks of concrete that they knock off the embrasure whack about harmless. When we can breathe and see in the chamber again we examine the gun anxiously ; there are chips and scars on it, but it is not out of action. A hasty glance up at the embrasure and the wings outside shows dimly in the fading brown fumes a sad spectacle—fragments of torn sandbags, projecting ends of iron rails and reinforcing iron, and large fragments of broken concrete, all stained with yellow and covered with a gray dust of pulverized cement. Several tons of sand have fallen down into the opening, but the muzzle of the gun is still clear. I have just heard on the telephone that our observers are being hindered by an enemy smoke-screen, so I make use of the pause to claim Kerr's sympathy.

“ Kerr, there is a week of sand off the top, and that last one will give us a week's work on the embrasure too.”

“ Hades ! but you can pack up now.”

“ It has been the devil of a time, Kerr.”

“ It looked gay. Tea's ready.”

The 11-inch howitzer has ceased fire, but a battery

of field guns has opened on us—that is common form ; perhaps the idea is to worry any working parties that may be set to clear up the mess after the big *strafe*. When we come up to the light of day again the air is seamed with the whistle of the small shells, and the saucer in the dunes and the dug-outs beyond are starred and cracking with their bursts. Kerr is strolling over towards us in a state of abstraction in order to inspect the damage. I wish that he would not stroll like that ; it is dangerous, and it makes me feel a fool when I run, as I certainly shall.

Such was a characteristic shoot at Lewin during the daytime. Sometimes it was, like this one, a counter-battery shoot in order to “dry up” an enemy battery that was giving trouble. Sometimes it was a long shoot “for destruction,” when we turned to and shot away at a gun position until we had reason to suppose that we had knocked it to bits. Ordinarily we did not shoot during the night ; we were too big and expensive to be used for the random fire for annoyance which is all that is possible in the dark, and that was left to the field guns and the sixty pounders. Not a night passed but its silence was broken by the ringing smack of the sixty-pounder battery just behind us. But even at night we were always liable to be turned out in case of special need in order to encourage the infantry. If the infantry expected an attack, or for some other reason felt lonely or miserable, they fired coloured rockets—“S.O.S.”—that meant “Help, please !” Then all the guns within reach had to set to work in order to cheer them up. We ran over to the gun-pits in pyjamas and boots, and opened fire on our S.O.S. targets. Barrington’s S.O.S.

targets were two villages, Wilskerke and Leffinghe, that were important centres of the enemy's communications. Observation was of course impossible, but we might reasonably hope that we were not missing the whole village. We kept on dropping one into Wilskerke, and then one into Leffinghe until the infantry were happy again, and said that that would do. Having realized on a subsequent occasion how encouraging it is to hear big friendly guns firing over one's head in order to support one when one feels in need of support, I like to think that the hearty uproar that we made in Lewin on those nights was a real comfort to our infantry in the Yser trenches and in the isolated salient before Nieuport. There was another nocturnal diversion of which the British heavy artillery was very fond. Having identified some building or other as a German headquarters, it would arrange to treat it to a shell storm at a fixed hour of the night. An "extremely secret" order would reach us that we naval guns were to join in with all the other heavies, two 15-inch howitzers, six 12-inch howitzers, twelve 9-inch howitzers, and so on, for five minutes' concentrated fire on the Palace Hotel, West-ende Bains, it might be, commencing at 1.15 a.m., "allowance to be made for time and flight." That meant that the storm of big shells must all arrive at the hotel together at 1.15 a.m., so that Barrington, for example, must fire as long before 1.15 as its shell would take to reach the hotel. We worked out the time, and at 1.10 a.m. I was sitting gazing at the official watch in the cold and dark of the pit with the gun loaded and ready. One-thirteen—one-fourteen—one-fourteen and a half—and the slow old howitzer shells from far

away behind began to take their handicap, and to start in the race with a distant booming. One-fourteen and thirty-nine—and forty-five—and our shell joined the race, and the whole field came together at the Palace Hotel. That was the theory, but in practice some idiot of a howitzer usually got the minutes or something wrong, and upset everybody by starting down the course all alone, like the proverbial dog at the Derby. When the first anxious round had been fired, and while the five minutes' "concentrated fire" was going on, it was worth while to mount on to the top of the pit in order to view the scene. The dark behind was lit incessantly, now here and now there, by the flashing of the guns, and the ground shook with their detonations. It might have been the day of judgment, with the crust of the earth breaking up and its internal fires breaking through. The impression of wrath and power was tremendous, but I wonder how much harm as a matter of fact it did to the Germans.

By this time, let it be confessed, the wish to hurt, beat, and destroy the Germans had become so strong that it left no room for any more doubts about the war in general, or the part in it of any person in particular. One said to me on my return, "Did you never feel any compunction when you fired a gun and knew that you might be killing men?" and the answer is, from the first hour that I spent in a dug-out at Lewin, striving for composure of mind while the fall of the enemy's shells edged up and edged away, playing, it seemed, with my apprehensions, none whatever! When another fellow is trying to kill you, you are not troubled by any compunction about trying to kill him. Your mind be-

comes centred in the simple hope that you will kill him before he kills you. Such a state of mind may not be ethically defensible, but it is naturally inevitable. There is no answer in it to the question "Who began it?" or "Who is in the right?" but those are questions that must be answered before one begins fighting. Afterwards one finds in the instincts of self-preservation and retaliation an incentive to action stronger and simpler than any ethical judgment, an incentive so simple and so strong that it leaves no room for any other as long as the fighting lasts. When a man fires his gun he does not say to himself, "In the name of democracy, liberty, and justice, and for the overthrow of Prussian militarism!—I regret that I may be taking the life of a fellow-creature, but it is the only way." What he says to himself is, "I earnestly hope that this one may get some blighter who otherwise may to-morrow get me." That is enough to think about during all the common events of active service. In order to bring one's mind back to the cause that makes it right to fight, and in order to revive a sense of devotion to that cause, some special stimulus is needed, some critical choice, for instance, that has to be made, which involves the great issue of life or death.

As the months passed at Lewin we felt more and more the isolation of our life there. During the strenuous times of July, August, and September Lewin and its approaches were no place for visitors. Hellfire Bend on one approach and Suicide Corner on the other were both ill places to pass, and tea was not very festive when it was drunk to the accompaniment of many 4-inch shells drumming on the top of the dug-out. A gas

storm was even more fatal to the festive spirit. One day a party of naval officers came up to Lewin from Dunkerque to see the front. While we were on the raised *route Aeolienne* on our way back from looking at the gun-pits the enemy opened fire at our part of the *route* with a high velocity 6-inch gun. The hands called this gun "Here I am," because its shells came so quickly that they burst before one heard them coming; there was no shrieking notice of their arrival as there was of the arrival of the shells of howitzers and of small guns: a sudden crash and smother alongside was the first that one knew of it. These crashes began to happen on the embankment at our feet and on *Côte 27* above our heads, and we covered the fifty yards to the dug-out in the appropriate manner. Still hot and breathless, we were cooling ourselves with tea when the air was filled with a chorus of little *crescendo* screams, and from the dunes all round about sounded muffled pops like the pops of damp squibs. "What a lot of duds!" said a visitor; but when many shells come popping all together like that they are not duds, but gas. "Corpses!" said one with a sniff, and "Rotten fish!" said another; and that is what the first and second sniffs of phosgene gas smell like. Mustard gas smells like faint radishes, and lachrymatory gas like pineapples. Everybody had to snatch his gas mask and to stumble about in it in order to let down the anti-gas blankets and to splash them with water. A shell fell in the doorway and split the blanket, so that we had to keep our masks tightly fixed. Conviviality cannot flourish under such circumstances. One sees one's fellow man dimly through obscure glass panes as a hideous, fishy monster of the deep, and

there is a rubber plug that must be held in the mouth, and prevents any converse more articulate than a sympathetic "um-um!" This particular gas storm lasted for half an hour, and it was half an hour after that before it was safe to take off the masks. Our guests then left, having seen the front, and no more came to visit us from Dunkerque. The three of us lived alone, and kept each other company. During working hours we were at the pits; there was always plenty of work to do there, even when there was no shooting. After working hours we sat in our spacious dug-out gallery and discussed European politics, and, under Kerr's guidance, the bases of dogmatic theology. In one favourite topic the two lines of discussion met. Kerr was very anxious that his temporal power should be restored to the Pope. Baseby and I were anxious that it should not be. Not often now, I guess, does that vexed and vexing question receive so much attention as it received at Lewin. We had the numbers, but Kerr had all the arguments at his fingers' ends, and besides that he had the great advantage that in the last resort he could tell us that we were straying in pursuit of reason, and that reason was a will-of-the-wisp in comparison with the sure light of authority by which he was illuminated. When the discussion had come to that annoying point we used to pray for the interruption of a 5.9-inch shell on the top of the dug-out, in order to save us from insubordination.

Life at Lewin was very isolated, but the world is such an interesting place that even all that isolation could not wholly prevent us from coming across interesting people. Looking out on the world from a hole

in *Côte 27* behind Barrington there was a man who did not find the work of watching the flashes of distant guns enough to satisfy for ever his mental needs. The mind of man is insatiably curious, and seeing us, as he said, running about day after day close in front of him on top of Barrington, he could not bear not to know who we were or what we were about. So on a day of fog and rain, when observation for his battery was impossible, he came down in order to find out, and that was the beginning of our only casual acquaintance at Lewin. As we were running about on the top of Barrington a figure drifted up out of the mist and stood watching us with an air of detachment. A small shell or two drove us all down inside the barrow for a time, and the intimacy of the darkness and the contiguity there helped us into conversation. He was a subaltern fresh from school, and for twenty-four hours in every forty-eight he had to sit in his barrow in the dune contemplating through a slit the greeny brown shadows of the German lines. When a gun flashed over there he turned a fixed spy-glass on to the flash and reported its angle of bearing over the telephone. When his own heavy battery fired he did the same for the eruptions made by its shells. The enemy's big high-velocity guns were always very busy with his dune. When their shells came crashing swiftly round his slit he would descend, if he were not too busy, into the deeper recesses of his burrow and make cocoa on a Primus stove. If he were busy he would stay at his slit and take his chance. So he would sit there in the dark, hand in hand with death, reporting the bearing of the flashes of the guns that were firing at him, and waiting for what might come. But all the

while his mind was elsewhere, and his occupation had no interest for him at all. The whole war did not interest him or anything connected with it, not even his own chances of surviving it. It was all a boring interruption; and he endured with impatience our conversational openings about the "shop" of the front, how many shells there were the day before, and how many there would be the day after, how nasty mustard gas was, and how much we hoped that our own new gas was nastier, and all the rest of them. So conversation flagged in the dark barrow until a definite pause set him free at last to ask a question that really mattered.

"I wonder," he said, "if you are at all interested in the works of Mr. Epstein."

We were mildly interested in his works, and as we trotted across the saucer to tea the subaltern told us how, while wandering in London on leave with nothing to do, he had turned into an exhibition of Mr. Epstein's most unusual South Sea dollies, and how he had found them extraordinarily pleasing. He had never looked at any statues before, but the dollies made him want to see more. Some one told him that he would find more statues at the British Museum, and he went there in order to see them, but they were a disappointment; there was nothing at all pleasing about the statues in the British Museum.

"They are no good," he explained; "you cannot see them when you come away; but when I am bored up there I can see the works of Mr. Epstein, and that leads to something new, and then I can go on and see other new things like them, and so on and on."

Kerr managed to remember something of the teach-

ing of the Church about art, and Baseby and I mustered some half-forgotten fragments of ideas from "The Seven Lamps of Architecture," and so between us we did our duty as hosts to maintain a conversation to suit our guest, not with absolute success, but with such comparative success that he said that he would come again, which was what we wanted. Sometimes thereafter on a misty day on which the artillery was quiet on both sides one of us would take a flag and go up on to the top of Barrington, where the observer in *Côte 27* could see him but the Germans could not, and he would wag up at the *Côte* "O.P. O.P. O.P.—C-o-m-e—a-n-d h-a-v-e—a—d-r-i-n-k;" and then if the observer chanced to see the signal presently he would come wandering round the dune for a drink, and conversation about Mr. Epstein. But after a time the signals were left unanswered, and we found that our friend had gone.

We became so used to the regular crises of day and night at Lewin that, strange as they seem now, we hardly noticed them at the time. When the shriek of a big shell was heard coming, the first of some new series, we would sit up and listen with curiosity. How big was it? Was it for us? Was it for the dug-outs, or for the gun-pits, or for the old abandoned position just ahead, or was it going over? The first round or two was enough for identification. "Eight-inch on the 6-inch hows!" we said, and settled back to our books with indifference; or perhaps, "Curse! that's for Barrington, and 11-inch;" and then, although there was little enough for us to do, we could not be quite indifferent. From the door of the dug-out we could see the black volcanoes of sand and fumes thrown up

by the bursting shells approaching nearer to the barrow, round by round, as some unseen aeroplane corrected the enemy's fire. The first thing to do, then, was to call back the crew if they were working at the pit. Between the rounds they came scuttling across the hollow. Next it was customary to ring up group headquarters and to tell them what was going on, in the hope that our observer might identify the howitzers that were firing at us, and that arrangements might be made to counter-battery them. Most often the hope was vain. After that there was nothing left to do at all but to make a smoke screen in order to conceal from the enemy's observers both our pits and the fall of his shells.

Smoke-screen work was always full of excitement. Bombs and chunks of raw phosphorus for making the smoke were kept in little shelters that were set about the dunes in a circle round the gun-pits and some hundreds of yards away from them. Having observed the wind, a smoke-screen party of three or four men ran off to whatever shelter was to windward of the guns, gathered armfuls of the bombs and a tin of phosphorus, and closed up as near to the pit as the arriving shells allowed. If the wind was blowing across the line of fire it was not so bad; the party could then keep well clear of the shells and let the wind drift the smoke across the front of the pit. But if the wind was blowing along the line of fire, and especially if it was blowing from the direction of the enemy's gun, it was unpleasant work. The party had then to get quite close up to the line of fire and to dash out between the rounds in order to plant a bomb or drop a chunk of phosphorus in front of the pit, just where the shells were falling. A

man stood ready with a bomb in one hand and in the other the bit of prepared paper that was rubbed on the fuse in order to ignite it. A monster fell on the side of the dune twenty yards away. He dashed out into the hole that it had made, stuck the bomb in the sand, and rubbed the fuse madly with the paper. Perhaps it lit at once and he got well back before the next arrived; perhaps it hung fire and he stayed there scratching and swearing in frantic haste and listening for the *crescendo* shriek that would herald another arrival. If he heard it before he started back he had just time enough to curl himself up in the bottom of his hole, trusting to the theory of probabilities to prevent the new arrival from coming to share it with him. But at best it was bad to be so close to an 11-inch shell when it burst. Although the hole might shelter one from splinters the shock was severe. Once I was out in the front of the pit hitting a chunk of phosphorus with a bit of iron to make it catch fire and swearing at it for not hurrying up before the next came, when I heard a heavy thump on the slope above and looked up to see a large black object sailing towards me through the air with a slow, wobbling flight. It thumped on to the sand again, and after gambolling along it for some distance stopped almost at my feet, just like a playful dog. One might have said that it was panting and grinning and lolling its tongue out. It was an 11-inch dud. When a dud arrived in the sand it got scraped as clean and shining as silver fresh from the jeweller. Sometimes after a shoot in which the Germans had been having bad luck with their fuses we found in the dunes near by quite a number of these enormous glittering meteorites, and

we had to bury them or blow them up with gun-cotton.

Smoke-screening was capable of a good deal of artistry. The bombs gave a yellowish black smoke and phosphorus gave a white smoke, and in order to make a really puzzling screen the two colours had to be mixed in the right proportion. The place of origin of the screen had also to be rightly adjusted in relation to the wind, in order that the smoke might be at its thickest across the front of the pit. When the screen was good we had our reward in the prompt effect that it had on the accuracy of the enemy's fire ; his shells would begin to wander off the target, and once or twice, when the screen was very good indeed, he ceased fire altogether, and that was a triumph. In any event, the work had the great advantage that it was something active to do in order to help the pits and the guns in their hour of need. It was too desperately annoying to have to stand by quite inactive whilst the enemy's guns deliberately found their range on to the precious things, and proceeded to knock them about. To see a big one arrive near the embrasure, or on top of the barrow, and to wonder to oneself while the fumes cleared, " Has that one got it ? How much of the concrete has gone ? " was unendurable in inactivity. By making a smoke screen one did not often do much good, but at least one did something, and all that there was to be done.

One of our shelters for smoke bombs was known amongst us as the Lobster Pot. It was a snug and safe little splinter-proof dug-out on the sheltered side of the route behind Barrington, and it happened to be near to the place where the route was crossed by a track to

the first line that was much frequented at night. Engineers and people of the sort who were coming along the road or the track at night, and were interrupted by a gas-storm or something, would notice this convenient little shelter and deposit in it whatever stuff they were carrying, whilst they made off in order to wait for quieter times. Often when we came out in the morning we found the shelter full of interesting and useful things—bags of cement, reinforcing iron, a pump, ladders, gratings, and all sorts of other lovely things, all very useful for Barrington. They were on top of our smoke bombs, so it was more than justifiable for us to remove them to our own store rooms, which were placed in sequestered and abandoned gun positions, where the goods were quite safe until their owners came and asked for them. Not once did the rightful owner come and ask for any of them; but sometimes, after we had cleared the Lobster Pot in the morning, we saw strange officers lingering about it with an inquiring and regretful air.

Life at Lewin seems strange in the retrospect, and the nights there seem strangest of all. When we three had had our supper, we sat in the long ante-chamber of the dug-out and talked about the Pope and listened to the far-off muttering of the guns at Passchendaele or to the nearer bellowing of the field guns in our own section. Presently they would wake up the enemy, and with a shrieking and a banging a flight of his small shells would begin to arrive about our own dune. We glanced at the steel splinters that were embedded in our dining-table, and we tilted our chairs back against the front walls of the dug-out so as to be clear of the casement. As bedtime approached, since

my sleeping-cabin was in a dune which was a couple of hundred yards farther forward, I listened to the arrivals outside with growing annoyance and wished that they would stop. Soon Kerr was yawning, and it was no good putting off the evil hour any longer. Taking advantage of some pause in the arrivals, I took my coat and my torch and sallied out. Perhaps there was a moon, and the shimmering dunes were faintly visible in its ghostly light, while the jagged line of the ruins of Nieuport Bains looked like the fantastic pinnacles of a reef of sea-worn rocks projecting from the beach. I thought of the long subterranean passages that led up to the front line underneath those ruins, and of the hundreds of men asleep there now in the depths of the dark cellars with their arms ready to their hands. There was a little ridge of sand between the wardroom and the hillock which covered my sleeping-cabin. I used to walk up it slowly, thinking "It is no good sprinting yet." I thought then of a mathematical problem which I had done at school, and which proved that the faster a man covers a given distance in a shower of rain the less wet he gets because, although the faster he goes the more raindrops he intercepts in each unit of time, yet the fewer units of time he takes upon the journey. "So," I reflected, "the faster I run to my sleeping-cabin the fewer shells will hit me upon the whole journey, but the more will hit me in each unit of time. But I can't sprint the whole way," I thought, "because field boots are so heavy in the sand. I will run from the top of the ridge." Then, as I plodded up the little slope, the moonlight would be pierced by the shriek of another arrival. It was at such a time, alone,

at night, and about some trivial business like going to bed, that one came to closest terms with the fear and dismay of the idea of sudden death. There was nothing then to distract one from the thought. "That last one went by, but the next one may not. Suppose that it hits me; I shall have no notice or warning—one moment here, the next dead—perhaps at that next tuft of bents—perhaps at this next step—perhaps I may never finish this thought." Thinking thus I arrived at the crest of the ridge, and went leaping down the far slope, hastened by more arrivals round about, to plunge into my sleeping-cabin with a sense of blessed relief. Once I was in there it was all right; at least it seemed right. The head cover was not very good, and the safety was a little like that which one gained from the perils of the dark nursery by jumping into bed and pulling up the clothes; but there was good enough protection against the small shells that were all that were commonly shot at us by night.

My sleeping-cabin was a short section of corrugated iron tubing with a concrete floor, and it was covered with sand that had been dug down over it from the hillock of dune behind it. It was approached by a straight passage leading away from the enemy, and lying on my camp-bed at the end of the tube I could see out along the passage and watch the bright flashes of the guns of our field battery on the other side of the *route Aeolienne*, and the lesser flashes of the enemy's shells as they burst about the dunes. Sound travels quicker in the sand than it travels in air, so that when a shell burst anywhere near me first I heard a noise like an elephant trumpeting faintly deep down in the earth underneath

my bed, and it was not until a second or two later that the ordinary noise arrived that travelled through the air. It was to that accompaniment that we went to sleep, and the night seldom passed without some sudden access of uproar that brought us back from sleep to lie awake for a while and to wonder if there was going to be a real scare and if we should have to turn out in order to "stand by" in the cold pits, or if what we heard was only a little more activity than usual in the ordinary nightly fire for annoyance. We had each of us a telephone at his bedside, so that if one of us heard shells falling near the other dug-outs he could reassure himself that all was well, except in the very frequent case of a shell having cut the line. A less welcome use for the telephone was to ring us into wakefulness in the middle of the night in order to convey to us some urgent order.

"Stand by in Barrington at dawn, please, for general fire on S.O.S. targets."

Then at the first streak of daylight the yawning sentry called us to stumble over to the pits in pyjamas and a trench coat, and presently there were ten minutes of feverish work, firing at Leffinghe and Wilskerke. When the uproar was over we went to shiver in the ward-room, rubbing the sand out of our eyes and blowing the fumes out of our lungs, and we coaxed the galley fire alight, and got ourselves the hot tea that would make life seem endurable again and enable us to confront with equanimity the certainty that the morning's demonstration would bring us a shoot from the enemy's 11-inch howitzers later in the day. We seldom had the consolation of knowing at the time what was the purpose of

demonstrations of the sort. Days afterwards we might hear perhaps that the infantry had been making a raid that morning from the Nieuport salient, and that we had been firing to distract attention from them. But at the time we knew nothing about the purpose of our proceedings; we knew only that dawn in the dunes was a miserable hour and that we were sleepy and cold.

Our strong dug-outs and our intimate knowledge of the conditions of the area kept our own casualties down, but there were many losses amongst passers-by and amongst newcomers to the neighbouring field batteries. The part of the *route Aeolienne* just behind us was a fatal place, and particularly so at night. Luckily the field battery next door had a medical officer and a dressing-station, so that there was prompt help at hand in the frequent cases of need. The worst time that I remember was one dark night in December. We were sitting in the wardroom after dinner, listening to the noise of the enemy's 5.9's bursting along the *route* a few hundred yards away, when suddenly our gallery was full of a party of the Machine Gun Corps who stumbled in carrying two badly wounded men. They were all so shaken that they could hardly tell us what had happened; but after a time they managed to explain that they had been coming back from the front line, and that where the communication trench crossed the *route* a 5.9 had fallen right into the midst of them. We laid the wounded men on our bunks, and our sick-bay steward attended to them. One lad was dying. He seemed unconscious, but just before he died he turned his head and said,—

“There's more of us up on the road.”

The others had not thought of them, but he had, even at the point of death. We mustered a party and climbed up on to the road. Feeling my way along it in the dark I fell over something soft ; it was the body of a man. A few yards farther on there was another, and groping about we found four more. They had all been killed instantaneously.

Such things are dreadful to look back upon. Remembrance of every dead man that one has seen comes now to ask the inexorable questions, " Was this well ? Was what was gained worth this ? " But at the time such things have curiously little effect upon one. The emotions are hardly stirred. In the presence of a companion who has fallen in action one can feel a strong sense of pity, that the unlucky chance should have befallen him ; but one does not feel any doubt or questioning, and the better the man that is gone the less does one feel it. This friend, one thinks, faced fate and took his chance, desiring no shelter. He counted the cost, and thought it not too high. To make an outcry for him against his lot, calling it unfair or cruel, would be to belittle the gift that he has given us ; it would be as if we were to say that he did not know what he was about in giving it. His glory lies in this above all, that he knew well ; and all that he would desire us to feel is a natural and direct sorrow for him, because his fortune was evil, and for ourselves, because we shall not see him again.

During all those Flemish days the thread that bound day to day was the life-history of Barrington. At Nieuport Bains my poor gun-pit was so close to the lines,

so conspicuous and noisy, and in consequence so well known to the enemy's artillery, that it was always in trouble and made an anxious charge for its guardian. Not a week passed in which it did not get knocked about in one part or another of its anatomy. The most vulnerable parts, and those which took the most trouble to mend, were the concrete square of the embrasure in front and the wings that ran forward from the embrasure in order to hold back the sand of the mound. One 11-inch or 8-inch shell dropping anywhere near them—and they were always dropping near them—might make a week's work. We seemed always to be working away between the wings, digging out the sand, putting up shuttering, carrying cement and gravel, mixing and filling the concrete, and tucking in crafty arrangements of reinforcing iron. Reinforcing is pleasant work ; it is possible to take an artist's pleasure in designing and erecting the skeletons of iron bars and in tucking in neat little bits of bent stuff in order to strengthen the awkward corners. During this work we had to be constantly on the alert to throw our shovels away and to jump down through the opening into the shelter of the dark pit when shells began to arrive in the neighbourhood. The enemy's field guns were the most troublesome pest ; they were always having aimless little shoots round about the pit. If they had any aim I suppose it was to do just what they succeeded in doing—to worry repair parties. During the bad days of August and September (1917), when the great artillery duel, which preceded the abortive attack, was raging, things were so bad that we had to give up working by day altogether. We used then to turn to after dark and to

work until dawn, with a break for a midnight meal, and even so we were for ever having to break off and to lie low in the subterranean recesses of the pit while the guns bellowed and flashed all around and the arrivals cracked and thumped overhead. At such times it seemed very snug and safe down there, and it cost a great effort, when the noise stopped, to get up and to climb out into the dark, where it was so open and exposed. Even at night, when we were invisible, it was uncomfortable to have nothing at all between us and the Germans. There was a curtain of Hessian sacking that we kept stretched forward from the lintel of the embrasure as a camouflage to conceal the dark hole of it from enemy aircraft. The crew always worked better and more cheerfully when we could keep that curtain up and work underneath it. It was not a very practical protection against 5.9's, but it was a great moral support.

There had been a big 11-inch shoot at Barrington just before I arrived, and I took it over in a battered state. The internal structure was not much injured, but most of the sand had been knocked off one side of the mound. There was a fortnight's work to be done in "sanding up," and that was the period at which we could work at night only. We appropriated a trolley and a length of line from a derelict light railway on the *route Aeolienne*, and lightened our labours by arranging a switchback on to the top of Barrington from the higher dune in front. It worked very well, save that now and then the descending trolley would jump the line at the bottom and tumble off with all the appearance of a first-class railway disaster in miniature, and with a crash loud enough, it seemed, to set the alarm rockets

going all along the front. About the time that the sanding was finished the pit had a bad blow. An 11-inch shell fell in the embrasure and brought down from the lintel a mass of concrete about a couple of tons in weight that in spite of its fall remained firmly attached to a couple of the rails of the roof, which were bent down with it. It lay on the sill of the embrasure, and although we could still fire the gun over it at long ranges, it had to be got rid of as quickly as possible. The concrete was set as hard as marble by old age, and it was full of reinforcing irons. It was much too big to move bodily, and it would take weeks to break it up with picks. Luckily it was at this moment that some unknown benefactor at the base sent us our first consignment of that blessed explosive, amatol, a stuff that looks like gray sugar and smells of ammonia. One can do anything with it: bury it deep and stamp it down well and it will blow up a mountain; put it in a shallow hole and leave it open and it bangs off so gently that you hardly know that it has exploded. We bored a hole in our fallen mass with crow and sledge, filled it with a cupful of amatol, gave the electric exploder a shove, and our prospective weeks of work were done in a second. How ingenious is man! The fallen rails had still to be cut through with hacksaws—a weary piece of work—and the lintel had to be reconstructed. We put a couple of fresh rails over it, and on these we rebuilt the brow of the pit with sand-bags. It all looked beautifully neat and symmetrical when it was done—for two days and no more. Three days after we had finished it we were heavily punished by two 8-inch howitzers, a lot of sand was blown off the top of the mound, and

one shell fell upon the right-hand retaining wing in front and smashed it to ruins. We sanded up again, and in order to save time and labour we reconstructed the damaged retaining wing with timbers and hurdles secured on a basis of barrels filled with concrete. The real struggle, one began to feel, was not the struggle of guns against guns, it was the struggle to keep reconstruction in pace with destruction. Unless the enemy were shooting back at our pit while we ourselves were firing, there was never much sense of contest about the actual shooting. The solemn old gun was laid by mathematics ; it leaped backwards and forwards in the pit in a dignified way, and made a noise and a reek ; the shell said good-bye with a scream ; and we had no idea, and never would have very much idea, what had become of it. But working all night until we were tired out, running the sand-barrows and mixing the concrete, taking half an hour's nap under the gun while shells were arriving outside, snatching a meal of bully and rum, and racing against time to make good the damage of the last shoot before the next shoot should begin—in all that there was a real sense of contest and of warfare. It was those hours of work that were needed to keep Barrington in action in her difficult position that were really helping, we felt, to beat the Germans. The crew felt that strongly, and worked away day and night with unfailing courage and good heart. It was hard and anxious work, but it had its reward for us when we saw the pit made as sound again as ever after its misadventures, and not only as sound as ever but even sounder, because gradually the crew's hard work on sand and concrete was adding to its

strength, right up to the final struggle, and but for their work we should have fared worse in the final struggle than we did.

Towards the end of the year (1917) there was a time during which Barrington was not hit by anything big, and we took advantage of it to make a few improvements. The sand that blew about the pit when the gun fired and got into our lungs, making us feel as if our tubes had been well scrubbed with emery, came for the most part from the loose floor. We gave the pit a carpet of cement, and things were much better. One of the chief dangers in the pit when we were in action was from the splinters of shells that fell close in front of it. When they were blown into the pit through the embrasure they buzzed and banged about the confined space like hornets. As a protection against them we built a screen across the pit that reached from floor to roof abreast of the trunnions of the gun. We made it of heavy rails with 6-inch timbers bolted on to them. It was strong enough to stop a good deal, but I have known a splinter go clean through the whole thickness of it as if it had been cheese. We were making little splinter-proof shelters over the mouths of the bolt-holes, a great convenience for us when we were waiting on a bad day for a chance to run back to the dug-outs, when the enemy had another full-dress 11-inch shoot at us, smashed the end of one of the retaining wings, and pulverized the sill of the embrasure. Splinters from one well-placed shell pockmarked the gun and cut an unimportant tube or two on the mounting, but they did not put it out of action. The damage took about a week to repair. We were finishing the last of

the consequent days of work when some 3-inch shells began to arrive at the pit, and, covered with the wet and grime of our labours with the concrete, I leaped down through the embrasure to land softly in the darkness on a red and gold general, who had come to pay us a rare visit of inspection. At the time he bore up manfully under the shock, but before he left he dropped a word by which, although he did not know it, he was amply avenged. Looking at Barrington's arc of fire he said that it was a pity that the gun would not bear twenty degrees more to the left, which would enable it to shoot at some important German batteries on the coast. Would we consider whether anything could be done? Of course we must, now that he had suggested it, but it was going to be a tremendous job. The only thing to be done was to cut back the front return wall of the pit for two feet on the required side of the embrasure, and to carry on the process along the whole of the retaining wing in front, which was ten yards long. We blessed the general and set to work.

At first we tried to do the cutting back by elbow work. All hands taking it in turn to peck away at the face of the wall for a couple of days with picks and crows produced some hardly perceptible scratches; at that rate we should take a year. We organized the crew in three watches to work the clock round, and tried again; at that rate, it appeared, we should take six months. So we had to sit down and think of something else, and what we thought of was amatol. Could we use amatol to shave the wall? It was dubious; a powerful explosive is not designed for fine sculpture about a comparatively delicate structure. A shade too

much in the force of an explosion, and we might shake the whole pit so badly that it would sit down when the next big shell hit it; but it was worth while to try—only we must go about it very cautiously. We bored a shallow hole in the far end of the retaining wing, which did not matter much in itself, and was well away from the embrasure, put in a very little of the powder, and detonated it. It blew the whole of the end of the wall to little bits. This was discouraging, but we registered the experience and tried again. A still shallower hole was bored in the face of the next bit of the wall, and a tiny quantity of the powder was shaken in quite loosely and exploded. It acted to perfection. A wide, flat cone of concrete was blown off the face of the wall, and the fabric all round was left uncracked. Having thus learnt to use our sculpturing tool, we bored a series of little holes all about the face of the wall wherever it had to be cut back, and joining them on to the electric wires in circuit we touched them off, sometimes half a dozen at a time. So we got the wall cut rapidly back without shaking the structure of the pit, and in a fortnight's time Barrington had got her twenty degrees more to the left, and was ready to give an unwelcome surprise to those German batteries on the coast which had hitherto been free from its attentions. We re-faced the sculptured wall, and the work was finished.

So by one expedient or another the pit was mended as fast as the enemy knocked it about, and the gun was kept in action, until the final struggle came. It came in December, when the snow was on the ground. Barrington and its neighbour Eastney had both been more active than usual for some days, and the irritated enemy

seemed to make up his mind that he must have done with them for good and all. The clear, windless days were good for observation ; our own aircraft for some reason were temporarily inactive, and the enemy took advantage of the favourable circumstances to make a big effort. He started a series of shoots at us with a pair of 11-inch howitzers, which were obviously very well observed by aircraft, and he kept them up for a week. During that week Barrington received 337 rounds. Day after day the shooting went on, so many rounds in the morning, a pause for lunch, and then so many rounds in the afternoon. It chanced that we were not wanted to shoot much ourselves at this time, so we were free to run about and to make smoke screens while the enemy's shooting was going on, and to try to make good the damage in between whiles. But in the cold still air the smoke of our screens would not rise or drift properly, and it seemed to give little trouble to the observers in the enemy's planes. Nor was there time enough in a night to put back all that was knocked off the pit in a day. All that we had time to do was to dig the sand down into the bottoms of the worst shell-holes on the top of the pit and to run up a little fresh stuff on to the places that were getting thinnest. All day long we had to watch while the stream of monsters arrived and the black volcanoes rose about the pit. All day long there was an unceasing uproar of shrieking and thumping and banging, and a confusion of leaping sand and of yellow fumes and black smoke. We became tired out by the mere din and by the strain of sitting still all day and watching to see how near each shell would go. Not until the evening could we approach

the pit freely in order to look at the new craters that had been made during the day, the blackened and smelling sand, the powdered concrete, and the torn and twisted irons. Gradually we lost ground in the struggle, and the pit was hammered out of action. At any rate, we thought, these attentions were a form of flattery ; that he should put himself to all this trouble and expense about us showed how much we had annoyed him. When at last the bombardment stopped, the enemy's observers contemplating Barrington from afar may well have thought that there was nothing left of it. At first sight what had been a neat and orderly gun-pit seemed now an irregular heap of torn sand-bags, calcined sand, stained and powdered concrete, and fragments of brush-wood and timber. One of the passages and its entrance stair were quite beaten in and destroyed, and the other was knocked askew, and of our splinter-proof refuges nothing was left but a smudge. The barrow itself had become a jumble of holes and heaps. But as a matter of fact the chamber within, although it was a good deal shaken, was still standing, and the gun was unhurt. The retaining wings in front were in ruins, but the embrasure had received no irreparable injury. The worst injury was to the lintel of the embrasure and to the roof of the chamber. Three shells had fallen on the brow of the pit. They had blown off about twelve feet of sand and sand-bags, and had cracked the concrete. The supporting rails below were broken, and they had dropped a foot or two in the middle, but the roof still held up. One more big one on the brow would almost certainly have driven the whole roof in and destroyed the gun ; the enemy had stopped just in time.

It was a sad evening that on which the shooting finally stopped, and I stood and looked at the scene of ruin. After six busy months, during which time after time we had made our damages good and had brought the pit back into apple-pie order, at last we had got the worst of it, and the pit was definitely out of action. The gun was uninjured, but we could not fire it ; were we to do so the shock and blast of its discharge would inevitably in a round or two bring the shattered roof about our ears. It would take a month or six weeks to make the necessary restoration. For the time the enemy had got the better of us. Kerr gave me what consolation he could. " All that this shows," he said, " is that big guns were not meant to live in the front line, and we knew that all along."

The authorities took a long time to consider whether the pit should be repaired or whether it should be abandoned and the gun moved back. At last they decided that it should be repaired, and with the good help of half a dozen Canadian railway engineers, who had a perfect genius for concrete, we set to work again. Our design was to build up two massive concrete pillars from the floor in the front corners of the pit to within a foot or two of the broken and sagging roof, to lay short lengths of rail on the pillars, to jack up the broken rails of the roof on these, and then to fill in the space between the pillars and the rails of the roof with concrete. The enemy let us be, thinking, no doubt, that we were finally disposed of ; the work went on prosperously, and in a little more than a month the gun chamber was stronger than ever. The pit needed only minor repairs to the passages, and to have fresh sand

piled on top, when the authorities changed their minds, and decided to abandon it and to withdraw the gun.

But this decision no longer much concerned Barrington's old crew. Early in February (1918) the Admiralty decided to withdraw all naval ranks and ratings from the Siege Guns, and to replace them by marines. Our crews were scattered ; Kerr went to the Mediterranean, and on my way to some fresh field I went back to Coxyde to take temporary charge of another 9.2-inch gun, an aged one on a railway mounting. I was to see Lewin only once again, but it was under such a characteristic aspect that the occasion dwells in my memory. I set out alone one evening to walk up there from our group headquarters, making my way along a field track across the polder, which was a mere quagmire of water-logged shell-holes, and was marked by a row of willows whose every twig was bent and slivered by gun-fire, and so on to the *route Aeolienne* at Suicide Corner. The Corner was being shelled by some formidable battery of high velocity guns ; there were clouds of dust hanging about the ruined house there, and I had to make a detour through the sedgy and half-frozen fields. There is a dip on the *route* beyond the Corner, where the polder meets the dune. It was full of streaks of freezing white mist that lay low upon the ground. The Germans must have noticed the mist and calculated that gas would lie there well. A shower of 3-inch gas shells was arriving, and popping all about in the haze. As I walked down into the dip it was like walking into a stagnant pool of gas ; the fishy smell of it came suddenly thick and heavy. I clapped on my mask and groped along the obscure road. A Belgian soldier came

stumbling towards me. The careless fellow had allowed himself to be caught without a mask, and he was already very sick with the fumes, but as soon as he got on to the higher ground behind and out of the pool of gas he quickly recovered. I started down once more to cross the gassy dip; but what with the mist and my mask I could only grope along a step at a time, and as I was doing so a 5.9 landed with a crump some yards ahead of me on the road. I sat down under the lee of a ruined cottage to see what the general idea of the shoot was to be. Apparently it was to annoy traffic on the *route* at the place at which I was, because the next 5.9 whizzed over the cottage and burst in the field on the other side of the road. I had chosen a bad place to sit, and I bolted for an abandoned gun position that I knew of near by, hit it off in the mirk by a stroke of luck, and went to earth there. After a while I lifted my mask, but the phosgene was still thick, so I sat and sighed through the tube while the 5.9's kept on crumping outside. Presently they switched to the left on to Suicide Corner, and I could grope my way on. A 4-inch battery was having a duel with our 60-pounders that lived on the edge of the dunes; but that was always a trustworthy shoot; one need not trouble about it unless one was in the 60-pounder battery. I arrived where the *route* ran up on to the dunes, and, walking up the slope, I came out of the mist and the gas and could take my mask off again. Our field guns had begun to speak in chorus, and the gas storm was stopping. At Lewin, a few hundred yards farther on, the marines were all sitting tight in their dug-outs; they knew nothing about any gas storm, but they had been

worried that afternoon by a long, vague shoot from an 8-inch howitzer battery. It had not seemed to know what it was shooting at, they said, and sometimes it had come vexatiously close to the wardroom.

When I said good-bye to Lewin that night I did so with mingled feelings. I looked forward with undisguised relief to retiring from that feverish spot to the tranquillity of a back area ; but every aspect of the dunes there had become familiar with an affectionate familiarity. There was no foot of ground but was associated with some high adventure that had been lived through with messmates the best that ever were. Scarcely a moment of the long days and nights spent there but had held high experience for us all. We had made good friends and some of them we had lost. It seemed then as if the days that remained must be drab days in comparison.

CHAPTER V.

ZEEBRUGGE—H.M.S. VINDICTIVE.

THE truck gun that I was to look after for a time—"Mother" was her name—lived on a spur of the railway in a quiet meadow half-way between Coxyde and Furnes. She had had a stormy youth, but latterly she had fallen on very quiet days. In fact, when I went to take charge of her she had not been used for nearly a year, but now there was an idea that she might be wanted again. We had half a dozen railway trucks for living quarters and for ammunition and so on, a pigsty, and a fowl run. They had all been camouflaged in light green and white, which made them by far the most conspicuous objects in the country-side. It was that, no doubt, which accounted for the frequency with which we were bombed. I was roused from sleep one night by the smacking and grunting of three big bombs falling in the field near by. There was a large truck quite full of cordite at the end of the train. When I turned out to see if any damage had been done, there was a thread of smoke coming from it, and I found that a splinter had gone through its side, and had set fire to some bits of sacking in a corner. We threw them out, and went to bed and thought no more about it; but a few days later, when we were turning out

the boxes of cordite in order to rearrange them, we found that one of the boxes was blackened. Opening it, we found that it was empty, and that its inside was charred. The splinter of bomb, perhaps with some thermite on it, had penetrated the box and ignited the cordite; but the admirable stuff had burned gently away without upsetting the rest of the cordite in the van. There was enough to have blown the whole train to Ostend. It was a remarkable bit of luck.

One evening I was sitting on the steps of my van and wondering what was going to happen next. "It is an uncertain outlook," I pondered. "In a few days we shall all be recalled. It is no good asking to be allowed to stay with Mother; she is no good. I wonder where I shall find myself a month hence—at sea in some torpid battle squadron, I suppose. I shall have to go and brave that dreadful ogres' den at the Admiralty. Why couldn't they leave us alone at Lewin?" At this moment Bill, best of commanding officers and most dynamic of men, came strolling down the line to pass the news. He told me where everybody was going to. He himself was going to reconstruct labour in a government office, and Captain Halahan, who was in general command of the Siege Guns, was going on to the staff at Dover in order to help to organize some special show.

"What sort of a show, Bill? Will there be anything in it to suit a man out of a job?"

"It is something very pink," said Bill. "I dare say that they are going to have a shot at Zeebrugge."

That was the first I heard of the Zeebrugge affair. I remembered then a plan of the Commodore's invention that I had heard about in the *Centaur* a year before—

a plan for blocking Zeebrugge with old merchant ships—and I wondered idly if this affair was going to be anything of that sort. Next day among my official notices from Bill was an instruction to call for volunteers “for an undertaking of real danger.” It came originally from Captain Halahan, and he wanted thirty men. He did not ask for any officers. “That is rather comic,” I reflected; “we are to ask the hands to volunteer for a dangerous service which we are not allowed to undertake ourselves.” I fell in the crew of *Mother* that evening in order to read the notice to them. There were a number of pictures that during the next two months were stamped indelibly upon the retina of my inward eye, and the scene that evening was the first of them. Our train was set solitarily amongst the shining pools and ooze of the pasture. A row of sad, thin lindens, splintered and broken by shells and bombs, stood black against a sunset of pale wet silver. The khaki-clad sailormen were drawn up in a row along the duck-boards that served us for a causeway through the mud, while from the steps of a truck I read to them the curt notice about the undertaking of real danger. I told them to go away and to think it over, hoping for their sakes that they would not volunteer. All of them had been for two years on this front, under continuous fire, and suffering heavy casualties. They had just been released, and were to go home for leave before re-employment. They had earned a rest, I thought, and they must have thought so too; but half of them gave in their names during the evening. The first to come was our desperado gang, a club of seven fire-eaters who had joined together to make a corner in all the “fierce”

jobs. They came together first in the trenches by the Yser as the crew of a boat that was to row over a forlorn hope of a raid to land in the German trenches. The army had thought that since there were sailors on the spot it would be nice to have some of them to help in the aquatic part of their proceedings. Where the dauntless seven led others were eager to follow, and the number that Captain Halahan needed might have been had several times over. For all I could see, most of the men were quite indifferent whether after their long service they went home to their families or engaged in the new service of real danger ; but at the back of their minds, no doubt, there was something more than indifference.

Usually the sailorman is reluctant to volunteer, and dislikes to be asked whether he will do so. It is due in part to his reluctance to make himself conspicuous before his mates ; in part it is due also to a superstition. He thinks that if he volunteers he is "asking for it," and tempting Providence to "take it out of him" ; but if he is "told off" he is quite content, because it is then a question of common luck.

I sent in the names of my volunteers next day, and soon afterwards we heard that they had been accepted. Most of Barrington's crew had volunteered too. A few days later I was recalled to England, and said good-bye to Flanders. I went to see the ogres at the Admiralty, facing that grim ordeal on this occasion not once but twice, and from my second visit I came away with orders to report for a special service on board H.M.S. *Hindustan* at Chatham dockyard. I knew no more about the service than that it was the same as that about

which Bill had told me at Coxyde. The ogre told me little. "It is very pink," he said. "There will be a fight; you will find the rest of the people already collected in the *Hindustan*." I was sure that the affair must have something to do with shutting up Zeebrugge, but how, or what part therein was to be mine, of that I had no idea. It seemed clear, however, that it was something particularly warlike; any operation against Zeebrugge must be, which was a place so tremendously defended with every sort of big and little gun, trench, rifle, and mine, and as I walked across the Horse Guards Parade to the Pelicans' Lake with my appointment to the *Hindustan* in my pocket my heart was in my boots. "It is a bad world," I reflected, "and few abide in it;" and I thought of the lad at Harwich, and how he had argued that to avoid a dangerous duty for fear of death was mere nonsense, because it was to let one's self become half alive in order to avoid being dead. "That seems rather too abstract and metaphysical an argument," I thought, "when one comes to the point. I seem to need some more concrete encouragement. How does the matter stand? I shall not in any case live for ever. Had I any prospect of doing so, these problems of active service would be much more difficult :—

'Comrade, if to turn and fly
Made a soldier never die,
Fly I would, for who would not?
'Tis sure no pleasure to be shot.'

But I have no prospect at all of living for ever. Ending is no doubt a troublesome business, and I would avoid

it if I could ; but I cannot. The question is ' when ' and not ' if,' and ' when ' measured in years is not, after all, a very important question ; at least it is not nearly so important as the question whether the English or the Germans are to win in the war." At this point a pelican by the rails of the pond lifted his bill and gave a sonorous grunt, with a derisive expression on his debauched and cynical countenance. It was easy to understand what he would say : " A lot of difference to England and Germany you are going to make ! Run away and play, my lad ! England is not going under for the lack of your efforts." Shaken in my argument by the disconcertingly keen sense of humour of the bird, I walked on in great doubt, wondering whether it was all worth while. It mattered a lot to me, and, as the bird said, it didn't matter a pin to England. But then the thought came that the victory for which England asked was not, in the first place, a victory for her arms, it was a victory for her spirit in the hearts of her children, and that by a victory there her spirit triumphed more than by a victory in the field. On the whole that seemed to be a true and sufficient answer to the bird, and I snapped my fingers under its derisive bill, and stopped thinking about it.

I went to Chatham dockyard and tramped across the rails and amongst the sheds to the edge of the square basin of dirty water where lay that aged giant the *Hindustan*. In command of her was Captain Davidson, who was the nurse of the expedition. I still knew nothing of its object or of the plan of operations. The captain took me out on to his stern-walk and showed me an aged cruiser, the *Vindictive*, lying half hidden

on the far side of his ship. The cruiser swarmed with dockyard hands, and rang with riveters' hammers. "There is your ship," he said. "The look of her may tell you something of what she is for." Surely it did! There were machine guns and short-range howitzers; there was an unnaturally large top with a short-range armament; there was a high platform or false deck of wood built all along one side of the ship, and there were wooden slopes to give ready access to the platform for men running from below. Here was a ship equipped for a landing, and for a landing in the face of the enemy. If to land, then where? The false deck was about the height of Zeebrugge Mole. "We are to land parties on the Mole," I thought, "and they will fight their way to the lock gates and blow them up."* It was not until some time later that I noticed the blockships lying in sequestered corners of the basin, and so came to understand the true purpose of the operation, and the part that the *Vindictive* was to play in it.

But that we were in for a landing in the face of the enemy was clear enough at the first glance; and troubled by anxious thoughts about the desperate nature of the undertaking which I had so suddenly discovered, I went to the wardroom of the *Hindustan*, to find in the company assembled there an atmosphere inimical to anxiety. There were many there whose names will not be forgotten; to have known them, for a few short weeks

* This was the programme of the expedition to Ostend in 1798, under Captain H. R. Popham, R.N., which resulted in the successful landing of troops under Major-General Eyre Coote, who blew up the sluice gates of the Bruges Canal, but through stress of weather were unable to re-embark, and were forced to surrender.

even, was as good a gift as life could give. There were strong Harrison, a quiet tower of confidence and security ; dark, electric Chamberlain, and dark, smiling Bradford, whose manner had ever the graciousness and gentleness with which the true warrior spirit is wont to surround itself in order to save it from hurting other spirits less finely tempered than itself. These great fighting men were leaders of the landing-party of seamen, and all three of them fell in the *Vindictive* or on the Mole. There were many others in that wardroom who were to die gloriously, but these three, of those who died, took a leading part in the work beforehand, and live most vividly in my memory.

Even amongst ourselves we did not talk about the purpose of the expedition, and it was not until I had been a week in the *Vindictive* that Rosoman, her first lieutenant, took me into the locked cabin aft where the models and charts were kept, and told me what that purpose was. Three old light cruisers, *Iphigenia*, *Thetis*, and *Intrepid*, full of concrete, were to run in and sink themselves in the Zeebrugge Canal. The *Vindictive*, meanwhile, was to attack the Mole that curves round in front of the mouth of the canal, in order to create a diversion in favour of the blockships. Unless the batteries at the end of the Mole could be captured, or their attention could be distracted, there was not much chance of the blockships getting past them. The *Vindictive* would carry parties of seamen and marines to land on the Mole in order to attack the batteries and to make havoc. The seamen were to be under the command of Captain Halahan, and the marines under that of Colonel Elliot, who had commanded the party of marines with our mission in

Serbia. Two Liverpool ferry-boats, the *Iris* and the *Daffodil*, would accompany us with more landing parties. There was supposed to be a garrison of about a thousand men on the Mole, and photographs taken by our aircraft showed it to be strongly fortified with posts for machine guns, wire entanglements, and blockhouses. An effort would be made to destroy the viaduct at the shoreward end of the Mole by ramming it with a couple of old submarines full of explosives and blowing them up ; that would cut the Mole off from the shore and so prevent the enemy from hurrying out reinforcements in order to overwhelm our landing parties and perhaps to capture the ship. A fleet of motor launches and of fast coastal motor boats from Dover would come with us and make a smoke screen in order to conceal us during the approach. The Dover destroyers would stand by in order to help ; the monitors would lie off and bombard the shore ; there would be a great preliminary attack from the air just before we were due to arrive, and my old friends the heavy guns in Flanders would join in the uproar. There was to be a simultaneous attack on Ostend by two blockships similar to ours, the *Sirius* and the *Brilliant*.

When I heard the plan there were plenty of things that I wanted to ask about. Whatever chance we had depended on the attack being a complete surprise, and I should have liked to have asked what was going to happen if the numerous fleet that we should be, some sixty or seventy vessels, was seen by a German seaplane or patrol boat during the four daylight hours of our passage to Zeebrugge. I should have liked to have asked, too, how we were going to avoid the contact mine-

fields, and what would happen if the enemy had laid observation mines round the Mole. But questions were out of fashion in the *Vindictive*, and I had to supply the answers out of my own imagination, which was not a very difficult thing to do.

For a fortnight the ship stayed in the dockyard basin while the work of equipping her and of training the hands was being finished. The seamen's landing parties went ashore daily for physical training under Harrison and Bryan Adams. A demolition party was being trained under Dickinson; its work was to burn, blow up, and tear down the structures on the Mole. Rosoman and I were, during that period, the only two officers of the ship, as distinguished from officers of the landing parties. Rosoman was busy all day preparing the special arrangements of the ship, the fenders that were to keep her off the Mole, the great hooks that were to hold her into it, the fourteen hinged brows (drawbridges) over which the men were to land, apparatus for making smoke, two giant flame throwers and their high pressure oil-supply, special slips for the cables, specially defended control positions, and a host of other arrangements. There was never a more overworked and harassed man, or one so highly gifted with the qualities of imperturbability and cheerfulness that are so inestimably valuable under such circumstances. It fell to my share to train the crews of the ship's guns. She had four 6-inch guns left (the rest had been taken out of her), so that there were four crews to be exercised in 6-inch gun drill in general, and in our probable proceedings during the attack in particular. In addition to her own 6-inch guns, the ship had been specially

equipped with an 11-inch short-range anti-submarine howitzer on the quarter-deck, and two similar 7.5-inch howitzers, one on the forecastle and one on the boat-deck abaft the funnels. The purpose of these was to shell the dock gates in the canal and the chief gun positions ashore. They were manned by detachments of the Royal Marine Artillery under Brooks, as were three pom-poms in the top and two more in the port battery between two of my 6-inch guns. The catalogue of the ship's armament was completed by sixteen Stokes mortars, also manned by marines, which were to be placed in groups along the port side. Their business, aided by the flame throwers, was to clear the Germans away from that part of the Mole on which our parties were to land.

The 6-inch gun crews did their training in the "batteries" of the gunnery school at Chatham Naval Barracks. Like the rest of the company of the *Vindictive* (as distinguished from the landing parties), they came as a draft from the Chatham depot. They were a very young lot, and there were all too few trained gunnery ratings amongst them, but they were very willing and cheerful. I found fifteen of our thirty volunteers from the Siege Guns already in the ship when I arrived, pleasant and familiar faces; the other fifteen could not be spared in time from Flanders. Having arrived late, these fifteen had all to be put down below in the ammunition parties, and that outraged their feelings as war-worn veterans. One by one the swashbucklers came and asked whether they might not have a place in the guns' crews, and Rosoman gave me leave to bring some of them up. They all proved a tower of strength, wherever they were.

It was necessary for our attempt that there should be a certain relation between the dark hours and the times of the tide. We must make it on one of five or six consecutive nights of the month, and if we missed them we should have a long wait, with all its additional risks of discovery, before the next series of nights began on which the conditions would be suitable. We must also have an onshore wind for the smoke screen, but that was a matter of pure chance which could not be foreseen or controlled. When the time appointed by the moon was at hand the *Vindictive* and the blockships moved out of the docks to the Swin, a lonely and remote anchorage at the mouth of the Thames, where they were free from observation. The land was a gray line upon the horizon, and there was nothing to see but a steel beacon standing in a melancholy attitude with its thin legs in the waves that were breaking white over the sands. All the fortnight that we stayed there it rained hard and blew hard, and it was very cold. The appointments of the *Vindictive*, whose return, although it was desired, was not expected, were not, it will be understood, luxurious. Another officer, Ferguson, joined us for the work of the ship, but we were still short-handed ; and all that fortnight we were cold, dirty, tired, and uncomfortable.

In the Swin the ship received the finishing touches to her equipment, victuals, and ammunition. The authorities expressed their warm interest in us by sending us some of everything that they had. We became a perfect museum of frightfulness, full to the brim with every sort of solid and liquid that could be offensive to the Germans. Even after we were as full as we could

hold stuff kept on coming—cases, barrels, bales, boxes, cylinders and sacks. Towards the end of the time the work of the officer of the watch became half a nightmare, half a joke. All day long tugs and lighters kept on arriving with fresh consignments of gear, some of it necessary, some of it “just a few spares,” duplicates of what we had already and for which there was no earthly room ; some of it the happy thought of some one who thought it might come in useful. It was as hard work to keep the unnecessary stuff off the ship as it was to get the necessary stuff on. While one was busy on the forecastle a lighter would slip alongside aft and deposit its unwanted load on the quarter-deck, and then the tired hands had to hoist it all back again. There were twelve vast and superfluous casks of oil that showed an ingenuity in stealing on board unobserved that was positively fiendish. Turn one’s back for a minute and one found them slinking over the side, or one broke one’s shins on them already hidden like stowaways in some secret place below. They must have been casks of exceptionally keen patriotic feelings and burning with zeal for the Service. We could not but admire their spirit ; but they were not wanted, so after they had been repeatedly expelled in vain they were sent ashore to be put under arrest until the expedition had started.

In nightmares there is usually some dreadful Thing—some horror that lurks at the heart of the dream. The central horror of the nightmare part of those days was a certain beast of a salvage pump, a thing like a fire-engine that weighed a couple of tons, for which the engineers had a fancy in case they should have to pump

out a flooded compartment. It was after dark ; we had just cleared the last of a procession of craft that had been arriving since early morning, and the tired watch were crawling below, when this object turned up alongside on a tug and demanded to be taken on board. We had no derricks, and how to lift it was a mystery to me. I tried to persuade it to go away, but it would not be persuaded. Rosoman, who, like a spiritualist medium, could make heavy objects lift themselves, was too busy to attend to the affair. The engineers stood in the background and said that the pump was the apple of their eyes. I am not sure now how the thing did come on board. I believe that it was hanging for a long time from a davit supported chiefly by a complicated arrangement of spun-yarn, while the scandalized petty officer of the watch loudly took all to witness that he had no responsibility for the proceedings, and I comforted myself with the thought that, if the spun-yarn did break, after all the guns at Zeebrugge would probably save us the trouble of a court-martial. The climax came when the davit " took charge " and swung suddenly inboard. The pump waved itself in the air, leaped at the ship like a tiger, and then instead of breaking itself into pieces and knocking a hole in our side, as it ought to have done, it settled with a slide and as lightly as a feather at the exact spot on the deck at which it was wanted. What could I do but bow and smirk, like the conjurer when he has produced the rabbit ? But the petty officer said darkly that it might happen like that once, but it wouldn't happen like that twice. With the pump safely on deck the worst was over, but there were still hours of work to be done in coaxing it down

below, along a passage, and through countless doors to its home in some obscure corner near the engines. It rests there still, no doubt, beneath the waters of Ostend harbour, and I feel for any one who tries to raise it.

While we were waiting in the Swin we put a final polish on our training in a series of full-dress rehearsals. The ship's company and the landing parties mustered at the stations which they would occupy when the ship was approaching the Mole, and did for exercise all that they would have to do in the action. Our proceedings were controlled by a series of signals on the whistle. My station was at the 6-inch guns on the port or Mole side. When we were alongside and could no longer shoot at the batteries on the end of the Mole the crews of the two port guns were to mount on to the landing deck over their heads and to make fast the retaining hooks that were to hold the ship to the Mole. There were two of these hooks, one fore and one aft—they were like gigantic fish-hooks about five feet long—and they were hung on to small davits with a wire hawser attached to each. We were to swing out the davits, to lower the hooks over the wall of the Mole, and we were then to make the hawsers fast. After that we were to help to secure the ends of the brows on the Mole, and finally we were to muster in the starboard battery for fire parties, repair parties, and for whatever else was required. When leaving the Mole we were to recover the hooks, or if we could not do that we were to pay out the hawsers so that they should not foul the propellers, and we were then to stand by our guns again to engage the Mole batteries. But there was always something

a little perfunctory about our orders for what we were to do when we were coming away.

We performed these motions again and again, clambering from station to station at the sound of the whistle, until we could have done it all in our sleep. Bury, our chief engineer, had made a clay model of the Mole, and we had it on deck and used it to teach the guns' crews what to expect during the approach. As the *Vindictive* turned to starboard in order to come alongside, we in the port battery should see the flashes from the batteries on the Mole appear on our port bow, coming from starboard. We might see also the black outline of the lighthouse at the end of the Mole. Those were to be our targets, but we were not to fire until our top had opened fire. The noise of the pom-poms up there, close above our heads, was to be our signal to begin.

Captain Carpenter, who was to command the *Vindictive*, and Captain Halahan had now arrived in the ship, and at conferences in the captain's cabin we went over all the chances and possibilities. The general opinion was that our worst time must inevitably be while we were turning to starboard across the front of the Mole batteries in order to come alongside. For three or four minutes then (if we got so far) we should be within four or five hundred yards of the batteries—so close that no smoke screen could hide us and no gun of theirs could miss. I remember Captain Halahan making a sardonic reckoning of how many hits competent gunners ought to make in the time which would be at their disposal, with the number of guns that we knew that they had on

the Mole ; and his reckoning turned out to be not far wrong.

The critical series of nights began for which the tide was in the right phase during the dark hours, and we were all in a state of expectation, anxious or eager according to our temperaments. People did not talk about their chance of coming through—people never do. I think that everybody was fairly sure that the ship would go down with a great many casualties, and that a certain number would get picked up by the small craft or struggle ashore and be made prisoner. At any rate there was some sort of a chance that one might come through, and since there was a chance it was unnecessary to confront too definitely an unwelcome possibility. It is a noticeable thing that if there is any chance at all that anybody will survive such an adventure one's inner self helps one with an automatic and confident assumption that one will be oneself amongst the lucky ones. That effects a great economy of heroism—the great and abused word should indeed be kept for those only who, for the sake of duty, face what they know to be certain death, as Harrison, Bradford, Hawkins, Rigby, and some others faced it when the time came.

It was, I think, on the third of the suitable days that the rumour spread in the morning that we were off. We took the marines' and seamen's parties on board and filed out of the Swin, the *Vindictive* leading and the blockships and the ferry-boats following her. The Dover contingent was waiting for us between the Goodwins and the South Falls. The sea was covered with craft—long lines of motor launches and coastal motor boats ; the two old submarines, filled with ex-

plosives ; a couple of transports to take off the surplus crews of the blockships when we got near to our destination ; and many divisions of destroyers to tow the submarines and the coastal motor boats, and to protect us on the way. The ordered lines of them all waiting for us there at this wide *rendezvous* on the gray waters had an aspect of intense purpose and expectation. I looked at the craft and saw how they all moved together in perfect unanimity in answer to the fluttering hoists, as if they were one machine ; and I thought of the men in the craft and of the immense diversity of motive and emotion that underlay the unanimity of the ships.

We steamed eastward without event through daylight into dark. At 10 p.m. I went on to the bridge. The expedition was then at the very gates of Zeebrugge, and in a few minutes we should be committed to the attack. We were all screwed up to the sticking point, and as I climbed up the ladder I said to myself, " Now we are in for it ! " Ferguson, whom I was relieving, turned round to me and said, " It's off ! " The wind had failed us at the last moment ; there were now light airs blowing off the shore, and the Admiral had just signalled to us to go home. Whether I was more glad or sorry I could not possibly say. My mind was a jumble of pleasure at the relief from sheer funk and of disgust at the disappointment of our plans. It is good to be relieved suddenly from the prospect that the next half-hour will be an unpleasant one, but it is bad when one has been braced up for a crisis to have suddenly to relax again with the crisis unfulfilled.

Everything else was in a jumble too. At sea and by night it is not an easy thing to change on the spur of

the moment an elaborate scheme of operations that affects several score of craft, especially when most of those craft are small ones with a rudimentary signalling staff or none at all. Signalmen were sent to prominent positions about the *Vindictive* in order to wink at all and sundry the essence of the new order, "Course west." But some of the small craft which were far off could not see the signal, and some of those which were near at hand would not. No doubt they all did keep a pretty good formation in reality, or many in the throng would have been sunk ; but for a time it seemed as if we had run into a block in the traffic of some Piccadilly of the high seas. Motor craft when they are going slow make a loud buzzing noise. As the *Vindictive* turned she ran into a crowd of them all sculling round in circles and buzzing loudly like drowning beetles. The water all round about was like one of those horrible insect traps that are put in the dining-room in summer charged with sweet beer and soon become full of wasps and flies that swim about tipsy. A motor launch would lurch across our bows buzzing, and then when she saw us she would fall into a hypnotic state, and as we turned to avoid her she would turn with us and come across our bows again. So it seemed at least, but then in the company of ships at sea in any emergency the movements of every ship except one's own always seem to be inspired by sheer idiocy. Every now and then a coastal motor boat would dash up out of the dark and shout at us some question which was quite inaudible above the din of her motors. Probably it was her position that she wanted to know, and we shouted that back at her. The answer must have been as inaudible as the ques-

tion, but the boat did not seem to trouble about that ; she dashed off into the dark again apparently much the better for her little chat. The dark was full of winking sparks and of the rattling and droning of the invisible motors, and the wakes of the speeding motor boats drew lines of glimmering white upon the black. Far away over Zeebrugge there was an exhibition of tiny fireworks. It was the air-raid that was meant to support our attack. Shrapnel sparkled in the sky there, and strings of fire-balls swung upwards with a waving serpentine motion. It was a pity to have to waste all that, but in a few minutes the *Vindictive* had drawn clear of the crowd, the expedition had re-formed behind her, and we were on our way home to wait for the next time.

We cast anchor once more in the Swin, and for the whole of the rest of the first series of suitable days it blew much too hard for the motor launches to leave Dover. On the last day of the series we formed up and started off on the bare chance of the weather improving, but it got worse, and we turned back again after an hour. There was nothing for it but to wait ten days for the next series. A rumour went round the ship that the attempt was to be abandoned. Some authority, it was said, thought that our abortive cruise must have let out the secret, and that it was all no good. Next day we heard that the attempt was to be made at all costs. These climaxes and anti-climaxes were the most trying part of the whole business. It made things much better when Admiral Keyes came over from Dover and spoke to our ship's company assembled on the quarter-deck, telling us that we were certainly to try again

when the right time came. We got through the ten days of waiting as best we could ; the second series of suitable days began, and with the first of them came fairer weather. We started off again, joined the Dover craft at the rendezvous, and steered a course for Zeebrugge. At 11 o'clock p.m. we arrived at the point from which we turned back the time before, and the wind was favourable. A few minutes later we took the critical step that committed us to the attack, wind or no wind, and we went to action stations. The night was overcast, but there was some star-shine, and also I think a low, young moon behind the clouds. Altogether there was a faint glimmer of light on the sea, and large objects could be seen dimly some five hundred yards away.

I left the bridge and went to my station in the port battery where my two 6-inch guns were, one forward and one aft, underneath the wooden platform or false deck where the leading companies of the landing parties were now mustered. The after gun was in the open battery ; the forward gun was partly enclosed by the superstructure and stood in a dark bay or casemate approached from the battery deck aft by a narrow entry a few yards long. I took my station in this bay near a voice-pipe behind the gun. Inside the bay it was impossible to see more than some slight differences in the blackness of the shadows all round. When we had felt over the gear that was needed for the gun, the crew settled down around it to wait. Some illicit cigarette ends began to glow in the corners, but it seemed an occasion for a little relaxation in the rigour of the rules. Looking out down the battery deck I could see or rather feel that they were crowded with men, mostly of the

marines' landing parties, and presently a lot more of them came tumbling into our bay through a door out on to the forecastle. They filled our cramped space so full that we could not move in the dark without treading on somebody, but the decks were so full also that there was nowhere else for them to go, and they had to stay. They crowded so closely round the gun that there was hardly room to load, and if we had to fire in a hurry they were in danger of injury from the recoil. All the time we had to be telling them to stand clear, and often to be feeling about in the dark in order to make sure that there was nobody in the way ; and that was our chief external occupation and anxiety during the approach.

For half an hour we waited and smoked in the dark, and there was plenty of time for a short look forward and a long look back. There was a recompense then for our several failures in a keen sense of satisfaction and relief, born of our disappointments, that at last we were sure of an attempt of some sort if not of a successful attempt. After the repeated bathos of the failures and the dismal and nervous days of waiting, one could almost forget, in satisfaction that something was going to happen after all, the circumstance that the something would probably involve one's own extinction.

What else were men thinking about during that half-hour ? What do men think about in the presence of death ? Some think much ; some do not think at all. Each must find the best thought that he can according to his capacity ; for the mind, in that pass in which none is so strong that he can despise help, turns

for help to whatever it loves best—not in longing or regret, but because in love there is confidence and security. If a man has loved common things best, the thought of common things will be all that he has to help him in the presence of death. If he has loved the face of nature and the good works of man, and above all good friends, then in that pass the beauty of the good things that he has loved comes back to him to be his strength, and the memory of his friends surrounds and fortifies him.

In times of waiting under great stress of anxiety the thoughts turn backwards and occupy themselves with memory ; they do not busy themselves much with the future. Up till the very last moment that night it was impossible to realize with any vivid conviction that the great adventure was actually about to happen. The ship was stealing along in such profound silence, the sea all round was so completely tranquil, the darkness was so limitless and so empty, that it seemed as if we might go on thus for ever. So the minutes passed until now it was a quarter to twelve, and suddenly there came a shock of conviction—"we must be within a mile or two of the Mole, and we are holding our course ; in ten minutes we shall be into it." To ease strained nerves it was a good thing then to run over again with the 'guns' crews all that they were to expect and that they were to do. In a few moments the ship would begin to turn towards the Mole under port helm. The Mole itself would probably be invisible in the dark. We should see the flashes of the guns in the battery at the end of the Mole appearing on the port bow. Those flashes were to be our target. If we could see the

lighthouse on the end of the Mole we were to fire at that too. We were not to open fire before the top.

At this moment from behind us and far away out to sea there came a dull thud ! thud ! It was the great monitors waking Zeebrugge with their enormous shells. The attack had begun. It was tremendously hearty and encouraging to hear our own big guns opening the dance, and to think that we were getting all the help in our adventure that could be given us. Still a minute or two ticked away, and nothing happened ; still there might have been nothing but open sea ahead of us ; but in fact the guns of Zeebrugge must be less than a mile away. It was incredible that nothing should be happening. Had they no patrols or searchlights at all ? Fortune was favouring us beyond our dreams. This was the critical time ; every second almost that passed now without our being observed much increased our chance of getting alongside. I stepped up to the projecting embrasure of the gun to have a look round. The foggy air was streaky with some thicker fumes than fog, and behind me I could just descry in the darkness a line of faint, gray plumes ; it was the motor craft pouring out smoke in order to screen us.

Then far, far away on our left the brilliant light of a German star-shell appeared suddenly in the sky, then another nearer at hand, and then one right overhead, which, to our seeming, lit the whole ship and the surrounding sea with an illumination so brilliant that we must be visible for a hundred miles. One could see each individual face in the crowd on deck staring angrily up at the star in hard black shadows and white lights. But still the Germans did not open fire, and looking out

from the embrasure I could guess the reason. The sky was now thick with a perfect rain of shell-stars; but clearly as they showed us to ourselves it did not follow that they showed us to the Germans. As each star fell into the smoke screen that now covered the sea, unless it was within a very few hundred yards of us, it was eclipsed as a star and became a large, vague nebula. Although then there was plenty of light about, a few hundred yards from the ship everything was blotted out in wreaths, eddies, and whirls of glowing vapour. The German gunners, I imagine, were peering into the vapour, unable to perceive any definite object in the shifting, dazzling glow, and wondering what in the name of goodness was going to come out of it. So we steamed on until we were some four hundred yards from the Mole, and we had just begun to turn to star-board in order to run alongside when the storm broke. This was the beginning of the bad three minutes that we had expected.* A searchlight shone out from the end of the Mole, swung to left and right, and settled on the ship. At once the guns on the Mole opened fire. From our dark bay we could see their quick flashes on our port bow, and there was a faint popping in the sea all round the ship. More accustomed to the crash which a shell makes when it bursts ashore, I did not realize at the time that this was the noise of shells that had missed us and were bursting in the sea. At the next instant they began to hit. "When is the top going to begin?" I thought. "Will it never begin?"

* In fact, I believe, the bigger guns ashore had already been firing at random into the smoke for nearly twenty minutes, but I was quite unaware of that at the time.

During the next few minutes we had by far the greater part of our heavy casualties. There were swift, shaking detonations close by, and one blinding flash of blue light right in our eyes. It was at this moment that Captain Halahan and Colonel Elliot were killed on the landing-deck a few feet away; but at the time my attention was so wholly fixed in listening impatiently for the first shot from the top, in order that the 6-inch guns might begin too, that I hardly noticed what was going on. It was afterwards that I remembered the eruptions of sparks where the shells struck, the crash of splintering steel, the cries, and that smell which must haunt the memory of any one who has been in a sea-fight—the smell of blood and burning.

Casting a glance out through the embrasure I saw a fine sight. The wind during the last few minutes had dropped, the smoke screen was no longer drifting ahead of us, and the sea and everything on it was lit up continuously by leaping flashes, so that we were plainly visible to the gunners on the Mole. Quick as thought one of the motor craft grasped the situation and dashed forward, leaping—almost flying—across the waves with furious haste, pouring out smoke as she came. She swung across our bows, right between us and the batteries and under the very muzzles of their guns, and vanished into her own smoke unharmed. It was a gallant act, and glorious to see.

For a time it was the last thing that I saw. Something went *ponk!* just behind me. A Titan blacksmith whirled a heavy sledge-hammer and hit me with all his might a blow on the right arm that sent me spinning down the narrow entry, to fall in the middle of a

group of marines who were crouching on the battery deck.

“Why, whatever’s the matter with you?” said one in a surprised voice, and stirred me tentatively with his foot.

The universe became a black star which had its radiant point just below my right shoulder.

When things became reasonable again I found that I was in need of help, but that I could crawl. I remembered that there was a dressing-station at the foot of a ladder near by. The crash and flame of striking shells was still making an inferno of the upper deck. It was no good lying about where I was. I might as well do something, so I crawled to the hatch amongst bodies and wreckage, and climbed down the ladder. While I was climbing down a shell burst a little farther forward in the same space, and the concussion knocked me off the ladder, but I was not hit. The space below was crowded with ammunition-parties and wounded men. The whole floor of the next compartment, which was being used as a dressing-station, was already covered with white bandaged figures of the dead and wounded, amongst whom the dressers were busy. There was hardly a clear inch of space, but some one gave me a stool on which to sit and to wait, and presently a dresser came and bandaged me. He was a stout fellow, as busy, quiet, and collected in that dreadful place as if he had been in a hospital ward. I was very sick, and a minute or two after that I found myself recovered.

When I got up on deck again the *Vindictive* was alongside the Mole, and sheltered for the time from the

fire of the Mole batteries, but she was still being hit occasionally by shots from the batteries ashore. There were sudden eruptions of din alternating with dead silence. The wet, jade-green curve of the wall was dimly visible sweeping up out of the dark, and back into it again. The last of the landing-parties was going over the brows, and there was an intermittent crackling and flashing of rifle and machine-gun fire up and down the Mole. From our top came bursts of the deafening uproar of the pom-poms, the most ear-splitting noise in the world. Every now and then there was a loud roar and a bright flash aft on the quarter-deck. I thought for a time that big shells were hitting us there, but it was our 11-inch howitzer which Brooks and his marines kept firing away steadily all the time in spite of every distraction. Looking out on to the forecastle, I saw the dim bulk of the *Daffodil* nosing into our starboard bow, and kicking the water out behind her as hard as she could. It was her business to hold us into the side of the Mole. Ferguson and some of the crew were busy there making fast a wire hawser in order to help her to keep her difficult position. Rifle bullets from the Mole made little splashes of fire on the deck about them as they worked.

I had to find out how far my guns' crews had got in the procedure that we had so often rehearsed, and I climbed up to our forward hook in search of them. The davit was turned out, but the hook was gone. I went aft along the landing-deck to the second hook, and I found the crews working at it under the lee of the house of the flame-thrower. A lot of things seemed to be hitting the far side of the house ; I suppose that

it was rifle-fire from down the Mole. The davit was turned out, but it did not reach to the Mole, and the hook was dangling useless between the Mole and the ship. We tried again and again to get it into place, but we did not succeed. Rosoman came along and tried too, but ultimately he told us to leave it; the Captain was going to keep the *Daffodil* shoving against our bows, and we must trust to her to hold us in. I went up one of the brows on to the Mole in order to see how they were resting. The swell, which had been very bad at first, was diminishing, and such of the brows as survived seemed to be resting comfortably enough. There was a lull in the firing close at hand just then, and a glance up and down the Mole showed nothing but a few rifle flashes, but I could hear in the comparative silence the steady thud! thud! of the guns ashore and of the monitors out at sea. That noise went on all the time as the background of the prevailing din; one heard them thumping, and then one of our pom-poms in the top, or some Lewis gunners or bombers near at hand, would break in and drown everything else with their uproar.

I went back on board to rejoin the guns' crews at the prescribed meeting-place in the starboard battery. Whilst making my way thither across the dark and littered deck I stumbled over somebody at the foot of one of the wooden ramps that led to the landing-deck. As well as I could see in the dark, there was a platoon of marines still waiting there crouched on the deck. A marine officer looked down from the landing platform.

"Aren't these folks going over?" I asked.

"These are all gone," he said.

I was sitting down for a minute on a mushroom head in the battery, when shells began to strike our upper works and the funnels and cowls which stuck up above the sheltering Mole. The German destroyers had seen them from inside the harbour, and were shooting at them from a few hundred yards away. When a shell struck a cowl or a funnel a spray of splinters from the thin steel structure dashed down into the battery and caused many casualties there. Our top also stuck up above the Mole just ahead of the funnels, and it was, no doubt, the uproar of its automatic guns that attracted the attention of the destroyers. But the fire thus directed on them at point-blank range did not affect the resolution of Rigby and his stout crew of six marine artillerymen in the top. While the destroyers' shells were striking our upper works close beside them I heard the guns there still bursting out at regular intervals into their mad barking. But soon there came a crash and a shower of sparks, and silence followed it. They are all gone, I said to myself; but in a minute or two a single gun in the top broke out again, and barked and barked. Then there was another crash, and the silence of the top became unbroken. Words cannot tell with what a glow of pride and exultation one heard that last gun speak. It seemed impossible that there should be any one left alive in the top after the first shell struck it, and when the gun spoke again it seemed as if the very dead could not be driven from their duty. We learned afterwards that the first shell killed Rigby and all his crew except the sergeant. The sergeant was severely wounded, but he managed to get a gun back into action before the second shell struck, wounding

him again, and putting his gun out of action. Would that Rigby had lived to know how faithfully his trust was discharged by the last member of his crew!

We could not see from the deck what was going on above us on the Mole, but whenever for a moment the *Vindictive* was silent we listened to the firing ashore and tried to guess what was happening there. I more than half expected a few survivors of our parties to come tumbling down the brows, followed by a rush of Germans to board the ship. But the Germans never made any attempt at a counter-attack of any sort or kind. When the *Vindictive* jumped at the Mole, as it must have seemed to them, out of the smoke, with her batteries of big guns and little guns, mortars and machine guns, crashing and vomiting fire all together, they cleared away from the place at which she ran alongside, and contented themselves with holding strong points farther up and down the Mole. The marines established themselves some two hundred yards towards the beach and engaged the strong points ahead of them. Bryan Adams led all that was left of the seamen's landing-parties in a gallant attack on the batteries at the lighthouse end of the Mole. Those were the batteries that had to be silenced in order to help the blockships to get in. Nearly half of the seamen's parties were casualties before the ship got alongside, and owing to the heavy swell the reinforcing parties from the *Iris* and *Daffodil* could not get ashore. With numbers that were all too few to start with, and that dwindled rapidly under the fire of the numerous machine guns opposed to him, Adams led rush after rush along the Mole, trying to get to the batteries and to destroy the guns. Harrison, who was

in command of this party, was severely wounded during the approach. When his wounds had been bound he joined Adams and his men on the Mole, and was killed leading one of the rushes, a most glorious victor over pain and death. The attack of this gallant band died away for sheer lack of men to carry it on ; but it achieved its purpose. When the blockships passed they encountered a severe fire from the guns on the extension of the Mole, but the most dangerous battery, the big battery at the end of the Mole itself, was silent. I think that it is probable that all the gunners had left the battery in order to resist Harrison's and Adams's attack.

One reason, no doubt, for the absence of any attempt at a counter-attack by the enemy was the complete success of one of the old submarines—that in command of Sandford—in blowing up the viaduct at the landward end of the Mole. A big gap was made in the viaduct which cut the Mole off from the shore, so that the enemy could send out no reinforcements to help the defenders of the Mole. Those who saw the explosion say that it was the biggest ever seen ; but I was busy at the moment with the *Iris*, and never even noticed it.

The *Iris* had appeared out of the dark and come alongside us at our starboard waist. Owing to the heavy swell she had found it impossible to carry out her intention of landing her men on the Mole ahead of us. The scaling ladders could not be made fast, and Bradford and Hawkins, the leaders of her landing-parties of seamen, who had climbed on to the Mole in order to try to secure the ladders, had both been killed in the attempt. Bradford climbed up a davit and

jumped ashore ; Hawkins, his second in command, climbed up by a line. The Mole at that point was swept by machine-gun and rifle fire, and was incessantly illuminated by star-shells and rockets. They must have known well that their undertaking was all but hopeless ; there could not have been a more gallant act.

Now the *Iris* was going to try to land her parties over the *Vindictive*, which, thanks to the continual thrust of the *Daffodil* against her bow, was keeping her position fairly comfortably alongside. But beside the *Vindictive* the *Iris* still danced in the swell like a cork, and it was some time before we could get a hawser on board from her or secure it when we had got it. Twice the hawser carried away, but at last it was done, and the men in the *Iris*, watching their opportunity, began to jump into the *Vindictive*. But meanwhile time had fled. We seemed to have been alongside a few minutes only ; we had been there an hour, and it was almost time to go. The order came that no more men were to land, that the *Iris* and the *Daffodil* were to blow their sirens (our own had been shot away) in order to recall the landing-parties, and that then the *Iris* was to go.

The sirens bellowed, we cast off the *Iris's* hawser, and backing away from our side she turned and steamed out to sea on a course that took her right across the front of the Mole batteries at four or five hundred yards' distance. I watched her with a sinking heart, knowing how we had suffered on the same course coming in. She had not gone five hundred yards before the batteries began to crash and bang. It was a terrible thing to watch. At that short range the light fabric of

the little ship was hulled through and through, flames and smoke spurting from her far side as the shells struck her. She disappeared from sight in the darkness enveloped in a thick cloud of smoke. I thought at the time that she had been sunk ; in fact she survived, after suffering terribly heavy casualties.

Recalled by the bellowing sirens, the landing-parties poured back on board of us over the two remaining brows and streamed down below. For good or ill our part was done. The blockships were either past or sunk, we did not know which, and if we were to get away at all we must go now, or we should not be out of range of the enemy's big guns before dawn. The *Daffodil* gave a snort, expressive of relief at being released from her long, hard shove, and of satisfaction at its complete success, and backed away, giving our bow a pull out as she did so. Helped by the set of the tide, our bow began to swing away from the Mole, and in a minute we were clear, and our propellers were throbbing.

As soon as our guns were no longer masked by the Mole we were to be ready to engage the Mole batteries, and I established myself once more by my voice-pipe at the forward port 6-inch gun. Mr. Cobby, our gunner (now lieutenant), came and helped me, and by shoving and hustling in the darkness managed to get everything ready at the gun, and to collect the emergency hands who were needed to replace casualties in the crew, so that I had plenty of time in which to think things over. My first thoughts were, "What luck we have had so far ! We are actually leaving the Mole. A bit more luck, and really and truly we may pull through." Then I thought, "What has happened on the Mole ? What has hap-

pened to the blockships? I wish that I knew!" And then I remembered what I had seen when the *Iris* passed the batteries, and I thought, "In two minutes that will be happening to us." My thoughts travelled no farther, and I waited for what was coming.

We stole on in deep silence. The din of firing had wholly ceased; all but the guns' crews were below, the decks were empty, and there was nothing to hear now but the wash of the waves alongside. The ship seemed to be waiting with her guns ready and her attention strained for the crash of a striking shell. But the minutes were passing. When was it going to begin?

Thick black fumes were eddying about the decks from our smoke apparatus. Once again, as on the approach, there came a faint popping from the sea. Each moment we expected the crash and the flame; but the moments passed, and still the silence of the ship's progress was unbroken. The moments passed, and astonishment crept into my mind. How much longer than I expected it was taking before the bad time began! "I wish we could hurry up," I thought, "and get it over, one way or another." And then I noticed that the popping in the sea had stopped. "Whatever can be the matter with them?" I wondered; and then I realized with a flash that while I had been waiting and wondering a good ten minutes had passed, and that we must be past the front of the Mole batteries and leaving them fast behind.

I could hardly trust myself to believe it. Had we perhaps been making a detour inshore, and were the batteries yet to pass? Cobby was standing by the embrasure and could see out.

“What are we doing?” I called to him.

“We are well away,” he said. “Here come our destroyers.”

So by the biggest wonder of that night of wonders we repassed the batteries not only unsunk but unhit. Confused by our smoke screen, and flurried, no doubt, by what had been happening on the Mole, the Germans dropped behind us every shot that they fired, in a furious and perfectly harmless bombardment of our wake.

We had pulled through, but we still had a race against time before us—to get out of range of the big guns ashore before we were revealed to them by the dawn that was about to break. With flames pouring from her battered funnels and burdened with triumph, death, and pain, the *Vindictive* sped away from Zeebrugge into the North Sea.

As soon as the destroyers met us we felt that we were all right, and finding myself now not so well as I had thought, I went and sat in the wardroom, where most of the wounded had been collected. M'Cutcheon, our senior medical officer, was busy amongst them, helping all with unhurried speed in that scene of anguish and extremity, and helping others to help by his quiet strength and undismayed hopefulness. Presently I found myself in a cabin on a bunk. People came in as they could spare time in order to pass the news. We were making straight out for Thornton Ridge, so as to get out of range of the shore as quickly as possible; we had altered course for Dover; we had passed the North Hinder; all was going well, and we should be at Dover before nine. Little by little I learned who

was living and who was dead. The *Daffodil* and the *Iris* were safe, but there was no news yet of the blockships. At last, and just before I drifted off into that vague indifference that is born of morphia, the Captain came round to tell us that the blockships had got in, and had been sunk in the canal. "We have succeeded," he said, and that was good news with which to drift away into a drowse that was for many days the end of all clear apprehension of realities.

CHAPTER VI.

ARCHANGEL—THE ARMOURED TRAIN.

IT was towards the end of July (1918) that I was passed fit for service again. The most formidable of the enemy's final series of attacks in the West had by then been stayed, but nobody knew or guessed how nearly the war was over. To beat the Germans seemed still the most difficult thing in the world to do, and it was still the thing in the world that mattered most. If we could not beat them in the West we must make a new front of our own in the East in order to replace the vanished Russian front, and we must beat them there. It was towards Russia that all eyes were turning that midsummer, seeking some fresh means by which to give the Germans trouble, and when I reported at the Admiralty in order to see about my next employment it was accordingly on a Russian adventure that I found myself embarked. A ship's company under the command of Captain Wills, R.N., was starting on a transport for Murmansk in thirty-six hours. It was to take over an old Russian cruiser, the *Askold*, that was lying in the Murmansk river, and when she had been thus converted into a British ship she was to go on to Archangel and to help in the occupation of that town. The ship, I was told, might be landing guns, and having

some experience of naval guns ashore, I might come in useful.

On the next morning I fell into a special train for Invergordon with some sense of haste and flurry. Most of the ship's company for the *Askold* were in the train too, and they were all suffering from the same symptoms. None of them had had even as much time as I in which to equip themselves for an Arctic winter ; and some of them by a joke characteristic of the ogres at the Admiralty had just come back from the east coast of Africa, and had been given no time at all in which to make any additions to their tropical kit. On the way to Invergordon we explored the possibilities of the trip, but we did not know enough about the situation in Northern Russia to be able to foretell our future. All we knew was that there was an Allied force of some sort based on Murmansk, which is an ice-free port in the Kola inlet, and that it had been sent there to prevent the Germans or their friends the Finns from seizing the place for a submarine base. We knew, too, that the *Askold* was to demonstrate against Archangel, but for what purpose or what was the state of affairs at Archangel, about that we knew nothing ; nor did we much care to know, except in so far as it affected our prospects of getting something to do. It was enough to be sure that in some way or other we were going to worry the Germans.

At Invergordon we all embarked on the *Stephen* transport, Captain Dowse. A fortnight after we left Cromarty Firth two little old torpedo boats that had once been Russian met us off the mouth of the Kola inlet and escorted us up to the wooden jetties and the

handful of log-houses that make up Murmansk. The news was that H.M.S. *Attentive*, a light cruiser, with a transport containing some French and British infantry, had left for Archangel the day before our arrival. A revolution against the Bolshevik and anti-Ally Government at Archangel had broken out prematurely, and the expedition had hurried off to Archangel in order to support it. Our orders were to get the *Askold* ready, and to follow as quickly as we could. She had been in the hands of the Bolshevik mutineers for six months or so; it was a few weeks only since they had been expelled from her; and as a result of their peculiar ways of life the whole ship was in an indescribably filthy condition. The cabins crawled with bugs, and the crew had made use of the engine-room hatches as latrines. We found their log on board, and the last entry in it was, "Held general meeting of the crew to consider the question of work." To judge by the state of the ship the question must have been answered unanimously in the negative. Fortunately the Bolsheviks had left her guns and her engines alone, and they were in fair working order.

News soon came that the *Attentive* had captured Archangel after an ineffectual demonstration on the part of one of the forts at the mouth of the Dvina, that the Allied force had landed with little opposition, and that the Bolshevik Government had made good its escape with the treasure chest. It was with a feeling that we were a day after the fair that we weighed anchor and made our way round into the White Sea. When we arrived at Archangel we found that events had moved fast. General Poole and a British staff

were already established in charge of things, and a local government had been formed of citizens of moderate opinions in order to carry on the administrative business of the town. On the arrival of the *Attentive* the irreconcilable Bolsheviks had fled to Bakaritsa, on the opposite (left) bank of the Dvina river. They had been shelled there by the guns of the *Attentive*, and had then fled by rail to Isaka Gorka, a village and station on the railway two or three miles inland. Three half-companies of French infantry of the Colonial (Marine) Regiment had been sent in pursuit of them, and had driven them out of Isaka Gorka and away up the line into the interior. A force was being prepared to start up the Dvina river, and it was to be supported by improvised gun-boats.

We waited idly on board for some days while the situation ashore continued to develop rapidly. A small force started up the Dvina; and the French on the railway soon brought matters to a head. We heard that they had advanced in a train for about forty miles up the line through the forest, and that they had then come upon a Bolshevik force entrenched in a strong position across the line. There had been some hard fighting, but the French had not succeeded in taking the position, and their advance was checked. Reinforcements were to be sent to them, and a campaign was to be begun in due form. Advantage was to be taken of the suddenness of our landing to make a dash right down the railway to Vologda, which was 350 miles away to the south. Vologda is a railway centre of great importance; it is the junction between the east and west line from Petrograd to Viatka and Perm, and the

north and south line from Archangel to Moscow. At the same time another force was to dash up the Dvina river, which runs from south to north in a direction roughly parallel to that of the railway from Vologda to Moscow, and to occupy Kotlas, a village about three hundred miles south of Archangel. At Kotlas it would find the end of a branch line that runs two hundred miles farther south to Viatka. At Vologda and Viatka respectively the railway and the river forces would cut the communications of the Bolshevik army which was acting against the Allied forces in Siberia, and there they would hold out until the Allied forces could arrive from Siberia over the Urals and through Ekaterinburg and Perm. Everything was to go with a rush. Not much resistance, we were told, was to be expected from the ill-led, ill-fed, and disorganized forces of Trotsky. Our forces were to dash ahead as fast as trains and steamers could carry them, and well before the winter they would be securely installed at Vologda and Viatka. That, I believe, was the theory, and in those early days we did not doubt that it was all quite possible, although it seemed a little odd that we should already be hearing of severe fighting only forty miles down the line, because the distance was 350 miles to Vologda.

Thanks to the kind offices of Captain Wills, General Poole was made aware that there was an officer in the *Glory IV*. who had seen service ashore, and I had an exciting order to report to him forthwith. As I went into his room I was wondering what could be the service for which I was required. *Liaison* work with the Serbians at Murmansk was all that I could think of, but the General started the subject of armoured trains. That

was what was needed, he told me, to drive the Bolsheviks down the line to Vologda, and one was being prepared. He told me about its guns, and asked me what I thought about it.

I thought that it was very nice, and wondered what it had to do with me.

"Will you take it on?" he said, and his interrogative stood for an imperative.

Hesitating to believe in my luck, I waited to make sure that he was offering me the command, and then I tried to look as if I had been born and bred in an armoured train. After all, had I not been in charge of "Mother" in Flanders? It was true that she had never been fired or even moved in my time, but still she was a gun on a train, and that was something. So it was settled, and I hurried off to find the train. "You should have a brisk time to begin with," were the General's parting words, "and after that you will be shooting all the way to Vologda."

The next ten days were obscured by a mist of hurrys hither and thither with Colonel Ewart, who was in charge of the preparation of the train, of journeys in pursuit of elusive military authorities, of urgings and imprecations of dallying workmen, and of cudgelling of the brains in order to think of all the supplies and apparatus that were required. The days were passed in rushing to and fro, the nights at the quarters of whatever kindly countryman happened to be near when it was too late to bother anybody any more. The staff kept urging us to hurry and to hurry; the dash for Vologda, they said, was being stopped by the lack of an armoured train; and the vibrations to and fro of the Colonel and myself

became ever more rapid until we certainly emitted sound, and almost emitted light. At last, after ten days and nights of work, the cars and engine were ready so far as essentials went. There were many details still unfinished, but I could finish them as I went. I collected together all the cars that I was going to take, and made them up into a train. It was organized in three units. First there was a forward unit to do reconnaissance work and to fight at close quarters. This was the armoured train proper; it consisted of (1) two flats to explode mines; (2) No. 1 car, which was a protected car with a 3-inch howitzer in the bows of it; (3) an armoured engine; (4) No. 2 car, which was a protected car with a 2.5-inch Vickers gun; (5) the infantry car, which was a protected car which had no gun in it, and was meant to carry an escort or "landing party" of infantry. For secondary armament the forward unit had twelve Lewis guns. Next came an auxiliary unit, which was not to act as part of the armoured train in offensive operations, but was to do the ordinary work of field artillery independently of the forward unit. It consisted of three unprotected cars, No. 4, with two 3-inch howitzers, and Nos. 5 and 6, each with a 3-inch naval gun. Lastly came the ammunition cars and the living cars. The crews were assembled, such of them as were at Archangel, including seven men and a corporal of the Royal Marine Light Infantry from the *Askold*, two British sergeants, one of the Royal Field Artillery, and one of the Royal Garrison Artillery, whom I extorted from the authorities with no small difficulty, an interpreter from the Baltic provinces who had been a commercial clerk, and a local Russian carpenter. The

carpenter was a lazy fellow, but he was a great comfort and luxury in making our living cars habitable. The interpreter was not a success ; he could not speak much English at any time, and under fire he could not speak any language at all, so he had to be returned to store. To drive the engine we had a Russian driver and stoker, who were servants of the one-time railway company.

After a first night (August 17-18, 1918) in the train on the quays at Bakaritsa the Colonel came down and gave us the word to start. "Good-bye! Keep your heads down," he said, and I registered a resolve to take his good advice. The train came to life and ran off to Isaka Gorka, where I stopped in order to report to General Finlayson, who was in command under General Poole of the railway and river forces. From him I heard the latest news about the situation. The railway force was stuck fast about forty miles up the line, where it was waiting to renew the attack on the Bolshevik position, which was some seven or eight miles farther on at the Chيامа brook. The force consisted of about three hundred French infantry, half of which was up at the front and half in support at points on the line behind. I was to push on with the train to the front, and to report to Colonel Guard, Royal Scots, who was in command under General Finlayson of the railway force, and I was to take care that I did not overrun his position in the dark and blunder into Bolshevik outposts. Colonel Guard's position, I was told, was at verst (kilometre) post No. 506, and I promised myself to keep a very sharp eye on the posts as I passed them.

The General and his staff came to the station to

inspect the train and to see us off. He was pleased with the train ; it was a good train, he said, and should " put the wind up " the Bolsheviks. The great thing, he said, was to push ahead as hard as we could, and to make a dash of it to Vologda. There was nothing much against us ; the Bolshevik troops were a poor lot. " But look out for traps," he added ; " the sort of thing that they will do is to leave behind them a machine gun or an 18-pounder, camouflaged by a broken-down truck ; but with your train you needn't mind any number of machine guns." I thought to myself that I would mind even a small number of machine guns very much indeed. Meanwhile the staff was discussing the adequacy of our protection against rifle fire. Some said that our sand coffers would keep out a bullet at short range ; some said that they would not ; and I thought that their expert opinions about our chances of being shot in the cars were extraordinarily interesting.

There was the same note of tender melancholy in their farewells that I had noticed on a previous occasion, when I was leaving Athens for Belgrade in 1915, and now as then I found it most disconcerting. It was in consequence with a sense of apprehension that I mounted a guard in each gun truck and another strong one at the end of the train, and gave the word to go ahead.

We whistled and puffed off into the forest. At once an infinite army of fir trees wheeled up on each side of us and ranged themselves along the straight line of the railway in an endless perspective before us and behind. The country was perfectly flat, the line ran perfectly straight, and the trees were all exactly the same size,

so that we seemed to be travelling all the time at the bottom of a cutting the sides of which were made not of earth but of the boughs of trees. The forest was so dense and so continuous that all the months that I was with the railway force I never saw a single open space in it save some meadows at Oborserskaia and the marsh that was the battlefield of Veliki Boloto. It was so thickly grown with trees and underbrush, and the ground was so swampy and so cumbered with fallen and rotting trunks, that it was almost impossible to walk about save on the clearing of the line, and that was about ten yards wide only. As long, moreover, as the warmer weather lasted any one who ventured a few paces aside into the forest was at once eaten alive by mosquitoes. We lived and fought on the line as if it had been a causeway. The war in Flanders had length, breadth, and thickness into the bowels of the earth, but this war in Russia had one dimension only—that of length.

The forest was an evergreen forest of spruce and pine, and along the edges of the line there was a border of silver birch and sumac. The undergrowth was chiefly winberry and shrubby plants which grew in strong, wiry forms that had been toughened and restrained by the long winter snows. Wherever a tiny gap allowed one to see something more than the press of straight, lichen-covered trunks, the dark green of the boughs and the light green of the undergrowth made pictures of great beauty ; but on our first journey we did not think much of the beauty of the forest—we thought only of how thick it was and how swampy, and what a difficult country it was going to be for military operations and particularly for artillery. We

jolted down the alley through the trees, and soon after dark we were relieved of further anxiety concerning the whereabouts of Colonel Guard and his force by coming to a station, Holmogorskaya, and finding there a reserve company of the French who gave us definite news that Guard's Headquarters were only three versts farther on. Soon afterwards we saw fires twinkling ahead of us, and we ran out into an oval clearing of the trees (point 506). There were sidings there that were filled with two long trains; French infantry and British officers were standing round the fires, and on the line by a native log cabin there was a first-class coach which was the headquarters of Guard and of his staff. The train had arrived at its front, and its active career was begun.

In spite of the frantic hurry that they had been in at Archangel to get us off, nothing happened for a week after our arrival at the front, and I was very glad of it, for there was still much to do. The day after our arrival the rest of my crew joined me—twenty Russians of the newly-enlisted Slavo-British Legion for the Lewis guns, under Lieutenant Beliaieff, lately of the Russian artillery, and a Polish officers' detachment for the guns. We spent three days in organization, and then one night (21st-22nd August) Colonel Guard and Major Turner of the Canadian Infantry, who was Guard's second in command, woke me from my slumbers in my truck and told me that there was a piece of work for the train next day. One of the aeroplanes which flew up sometimes from Archangel in order to reconnoitre and to drop bombs had let a message fall to say that it looked as if the enemy had evacuated his position behind the

burnt bridge on the Chiama. The train was to go forward next day and to find out whether the news was true. There was believed to be a Bolshevik outpost at a station at point 493, thirteen kilometres ahead and four kilometres on this side of the Chiama. I was to take some French infantry, to drive in this outpost if it was a small one and to serve as a guard behind which the train was to advance in reconnoitring. I was to find out for certain whether the Bolsheviks were still in their position, but I was not to become involved in a battle.

Next day at dawn we went to action stations in the forward unit, embarked eighty French infantry under Captain Apchet in the infantry truck, and started off up the line with Guard's blessing. We travelled fast until we had passed our outposts, and we then put a patrol of a dozen men out four hundred yards ahead of us and crept slowly along behind them. There was the same unbroken sea of forest as ever, ranging its long walls on both sides of the track, and there were several slight bends in the line that masked all that lay ahead of them. The little blue Frenchmen plodded along amongst the low shrubs and grass in single file by the side of the line, half of them on one side and half on the other. They had a most comfortable and reassuring air, an air of unconcerned vigilance which seemed to say, "There is not much about this kind of work that we don't know." Indeed I do not think that there was, because these men of the Colonial Regiment had campaigned for several years in the forests of East Africa, and they were specially expert in this sort of work. They had a bitter hatred against the

Bolsheviks for deserting the common cause, and as long as Germany was unbeaten they fought like professional tigers. We learned in time to know that as long as there were some of their blue uniforms ahead of us, even if it were only a handful, the situation was as safe as a house and that we need have no anxious thoughts about surprises ; but on this first reconnaissance we had not learned that yet, and it was not without a tremor of the nerves that I went round the corners in the wake of the patrol, seeing a hairy and ferocious Bolshevik behind every tree and expecting every moment to hear the clamour of a machine gun in the woods.

We crept with particular caution round a slight bend before the station at point 493, which was the place at which we expected to find a Bolshevik outpost. There was one of these so-called stations about every ten versts on the line, and they were all exactly alike. They were oval clearings in the forest about two hundred yards long and a hundred yards wide in which the line branched into three or four parallel ways connected by points, and for station buildings there were a log cabin and one or two wooden sheds. The whole of the clearing was filled with long piles of wooden billets that had been accumulated there as fuel for the engines. The piles rose higher than a man's head, and made good cover for snipers or outposts. The rest of the French disembarked from the infantry truck and worked through the wood piles like hounds in covert, but they found nothing. Beyond the station there was a straight kilometre which ended in a slight double bend or goose-neck, and then there was another straight run of a kilometre to the Bolshevik position at the burnt bridge.

Beyond the bridge the line turned to the right. Leaving a post at the station we sent the infantry on ahead down the line, and the train followed close behind with the two guns loaded and at the ready and the Lewis gunners peering through their sand-bag ports. I was so intent with my glasses on the line ahead that I did not notice the goose-neck as we passed it, or realize after we had done so that I was looking down the straight at the Bolshevik position. The line of the brook could not be discerned amongst the trees, and the place where the little trestle bridge had been showed only as a faint, dark mark on the shining streak of the metals. I had just noticed the mark and I was wondering what it was and watching the point where the line disappeared round the bend beyond it, when things began to happen. A Frenchman came running back.

“ There is an engine round the corner,” he shouted.

“ One thousand yards—aim at the corner ! ”

The little howitzer swung round, the gun-layer looking over the open sights as if it had been a gun. There was a tense pause for a minute that seemed an age, while every eye was strained on the corner. A puff of white steam appeared amongst the trees there ; another age of uncertainty, and then a black square loomed dimly, coming slowly out into sight from amongst the trunks. There was a flash of light from the black square, and at the same instant I gave the word to fire and the howitzer cracked in my ear. A shell screamed close overhead and burst with a thud in the forest behind. I could not see ours burst.

“ Down four hundred—lay on the train.”

Our howitzer cracked five seconds before the enemy's

gun, and our shell burst visibly amongst the trees just beyond him ; his shrieked over us again. We were advancing slowly in order to make it more difficult for him, and he was stationary. The little howitzer was proving very handy, and we were firing faster than he ; the splitting cracks at my ear were gaining on the rose-coloured flashes that kept on leaping from the little black box at the end of the straight. " It won't last long at this short range," I thought. His next shell burst on the line a couple of hundred yards ahead of us, and ours burst on the line by his side. Two more of ours went there close beside him, and then he decided that it would not do. There was a white puff and a faint snort and he drew back out of sight round the corner. Apchet, who was in the car with me, raised a cheer : his men had suffered severely from this train in a recent engagement, and he was delighted at its repulse. " Everything that there is of the most fine ! " he cried ; but I thought that we ought to have made a hit, and if our howitzer had not been an unknown quantity to us I do not think that at the range, which had closed to eight hundred yards, we should or could have failed to do so. We had not, however, much time at the moment for reflection. While we were sending a round after the vanished train there was a flash and a bang from the forest to the left of the line at the corner, and a shell passed us overhead. It was another gun beginning, probably a field gun in a concealed position behind the trees. We could not see exactly where it was, but we fired six rounds rapid round about where it seemed to be, and after an ineffectual round or two, which were extremely badly aimed, it ceased fire.

It seemed fairly clear that our aeroplane had been the victim of excessive optimism, and that the enemy had not evacuated his position ; but Turner, who had been forward with the infantry and had brought them hurrying back when our duel began, wanted to make sure that the trenches behind the brook were still held. We re-embarked the French with all possible speed, expecting the enemy's guns to begin again at any moment, and with infinite caution we went ahead down the line, keeping the howitzer laid on the point amongst the trees at which we had seen the flash of the gun, and watching like a cat for any sign of the returning train. So we edged slowly on, until we were not more than two hundred yards from the burnt bridge, and yet there was no sign of any enemy infantry.

"They must have gone after all," we said ; but in order to make quite sure, while I kept the train jiggling about in order to upset his gunners, we told Beliaieff and his Lewis gunners to open fire at the far side of the brook, the course of which through the forest could now be made out on both sides of the line. At the sound of my whistle the twelve Lewis guns burst into a deafening uproar. Firing them had the charm of novelty for the young Russians, and they made the best of it. The din rose in wave on wave of uproar, and at once there came an answering crackle of brisk rifle-fire from the forest ahead and on either side of us. Most of the bullets passed whistling overhead, but now and then one hit the cars or the engine with a whack. "Heaven protect the steam pipes," I thought. Suddenly there came a terrific flash and smack from No. 2 car, behind the engine. "Hit !" I thought ; "No. 2

is knocked out. Is the line fouled?" But it was not a hit on No. 2; it was my garrison gunner sergeant, Halwell,* who was captain of No. 2 car, joining in the fray with the little Vickers gun, firing it through the trees at the sound of the Bolshevik rifles. "But why doesn't their gun fire?" I thought. "Now is its chance." I do not know why it did not, but perhaps one of our rounds had got near it, and the crew had sought a safer place. The brook and the trench curved towards us, and the noise of the enemy's rifle-fire seemed to be all round us. I was getting anxious about our rear, lest if we waited too long and the enemy realized that we were unsupported he should send a party to work round us and to cut the line behind us. I was relieved, therefore, when Turner yelled into my ear that he thought that the purpose of the reconnaissance had been achieved, and that we might as well go. I thought so too, and with a pull on the communication wires and a wave of the red flag, we gave a jerk and a clank and puffed off, and in five minutes we were safely through the goose-neck again and back at the station. It was some time after we had started before I could make the whistle heard above the noise of the Lewis guns and could induce the Russians to abate the streams of bullets that they were pouring into the innocent fir trees.

Since the Bolshevik, as was very clear from the holes in our funnel, had not evacuated his positions, if the dash for Vologda was to continue he must be turned out of them. But it was a week before the battle could be fought. Another small force, known as

* He received the M.M. for services in these operations.

C force, had started inland from Archangel along tracks through the forest between our railway and the Dvina, and we were waiting for it to work up into line with us, so that we might help each other by our several efforts. Our immediate object in the coming attack was to turn the enemy out of his position on the Chiama; our ultimate object was to hustle him back thereafter, and to occupy the village and railway centre of Oborserskaia, thirty kilometres ahead at point 474. When we got there we could stop, rest, and look about us. We spent the week in working out the details of the attack. Guard's plan was to have half an hour's preparatory fire at the enemy's position from all guns, while the bulk of the French, some one hundred and fifty men, worked their way round through the forest and crossed the Chiama brook beyond the end of his trench. At "zero hour" the French main body would attack the position on the right flank and rear, and another body of fifty French and a British machine-gun detachment would make a frontal attack down the line, by way of a feint or distraction. I was to take the forward unit up into the goose-neck, to join in the barrages, and to push on round the corner as soon as the situation permitted in order to support the infantry. The firing positions were fixed on the chart, angles and ranges were measured for the barrages, orders were prepared for the various guns, and all was ready.

On August 30th orders came from General Finlayson that the attack was to take place next day, and the trains were marshalled in the order of their advance—first, the forward unit of the armoured train; next, the various guns in order; next, the engineers' train to mend the burnt

bridge when it was captured ; and lastly, the living trains, which would follow as soon as the advance was made good. At ten of a dark night I went on with the forward unit, and running through the wood-pile station so as to clear the sidings, I halted on the straight beyond. Everything had to be done in absolute silence lest the enemy, hearing a noise of moving trains, should suspect the impending attack. There was no moon, and the night was a still one. Presently, by the faintest puffs and clicks behind me, I could tell that the other guns and trains were arriving and shunting into position in the clearing. One of them rolled up noiselessly behind me—a shadow in the blackness—saw just in time a shaded stern light that I had set out on the line, and drew noiselessly back again. Turner came along the line to exchange confidences in a whisper and to compare watches. When he left there were only two hours of the night left in which to smoke a pipe, sitting in the bows of No. 1 car and reflecting upon things in general. I thought a good deal about the goose-neck ahead. On recent visits with the train to the wood-pile clearing I had seen the enemy's guns, agitated by my smoke and clanking, making an effective barrage in the middle of the goose-neck, bursting shrapnel from two or three field guns very skilfully over the line. My first shot at so close a range must give away my position, and I did not look forward to sitting in there for half an hour.

During the night there was an occasional rifle shot from the Bolshevik position, on the other side of the goose-neck ; but our post at the station had told us that that was a common thing at night—the Bolshevik sentries seemed to suffer a good deal with their nerves. Other-

wise the silence was broken only by the rustling of the forest and the hooting of the little brown owls that sat about in the tops of the trees. There was plenty to think about in our general position. We were fighting our little guerilla war on a basis of pure bluff. The enemy certainly had twice as many men in his front line as we had in our attacking force, and his available reserves probably outnumbered ours by ten to one. On the other hand, our guns probably now outnumbered his. There were eleven in our oddly-assorted menagerie of artillery, and we knew of four only of his—two field guns and the two on his train, which we afterwards identified by their shells as 15-pounder anti-aircraft guns of which he was making use for ordinary low-elevation fire. But if he managed to find out how small a force he had against him, and if he had any initiative, he ought to chase us back to Archangel. "I hope that he will not find out," I reflected; and thanks to Guard's vigorous leading I do not think that during our advance that autumn he ever did, for he never showed any disposition to take the initiative.

I remembered that the train had as yet got no name, and that it was hardly right for a vessel to go into action nameless, so I christened her *Miles*, in memory of a friend of Harwich days—*Miles Day*, the airman and poet, who fell in Flanders. *Beliaieff* chalked the name on our bows, and then, since it was nearly four, and the first light of dawn was coming, we roused the crew from their sleep at the bottom of the trucks and went to action stations. The driver was warned that if he made the slightest clank or puff or feather of steam his cab would at once be struck by many large shells, and

that he himself would be exposed to the utmost penalties of the law, and inch by inch we crawled ahead into the goose-neck. The driver had been moving with admirable silence ; but when I stopped him at our firing position, which I had to fix by counting the number of telegraph poles from the last verst-post, he let off steam with a deafening hiss. I ground my teeth, but the Bolsheviks did not hear us. There was silence in his trench, and we found afterwards that hisses and clanks do not carry far in the forest. The noise that one can hear miles away is the puff ! puff ! puff ! that an engine makes in starting. Several times the Bolshevik train gave itself away to us by that noise, and I have no doubt that we several times gave ourselves away to them in the same manner.

We laid off our various angles of fire from the direction of the line, set out aiming posts, and trained and laid the guns, and I sat watch in hand waiting for the moment to open fire. The machine-gun detachment passed us, and vanished into the trees at the corner ahead. The infantry, we knew, were already working round the enemy's line out of sight in the forest. We felt very solitary and exposed in the goose neck, and I apprehended an unpleasant time as soon as we opened fire. The moment came : our two little guns cracked together, those behind joined in at the noise, and the Battle of Chiama Bridge began. We realized at once how great had been the reform in the enemy's artillery practice. In our duel during the reconnaissance it had been ridiculously bad, but now it was quite business-like. He must have found a professional artillery officer to take charge, perhaps a German. The moment that

we opened fire he perceived that there was something in the middle of the goose-neck, and he began at once to shoot at us with a couple of field guns, one firing high-explosive shell and the other firing shrapnel. It was not half a minute after our first shot that a shriek slipped just over the train, disconcertingly close, and there was an eruption in the forest by the side of us. The shooting during the following action was good, but just not good enough. His range was ten yards too long; his high-explosive shells whizzed close overhead, and burst on the far side of the line, bringing the trees crashing down to earth; his shrapnel burst immediately overhead, but the bullets threshed on into the boughs beyond. I remembered that it was not since Smederevo that I had heard close at hand the shrapnel's "crack! zang!" (*glissando* down the chromatic scale), the angriest and most daunting of all the noises of war, and I was not at all glad to hear it again. For a quarter of an hour his guns swept to and fro along the goose-neck looking for us, and giving us a feverish time. It was very pleasant when the shells had gone past to see the eruptions amongst the trees getting farther and farther away, and it was very unpleasant when they turned and came back to see them getting closer and closer. Meanwhile our barrage was cracking away noisily, and the hidden machine guns were rattling at the corner. Two little naval 12-pounders, which are not designed for the niceties of indirect fire, had been put so close behind me, and were shooting so low, that their shells came whooping past my funnel, and I had to send an orderly back to ask them not at any rate to shoot any lower. But mixed as our artillery was, and

rough and ready as were our methods, our efforts were not wholly ineffective. We captured next day a message from the leader in the Bolshevik front line to his commanding officer behind which read, "The firing is very severe ; reinforcements should be sent at once."

A message came through from Guard to tell me to come out of it if things in the goose-neck were too bad ; but soon afterwards the Bolshevik guns that had been troubling us lifted, and began to fire farther back, leaving us to shoot in peace. Zero hour arrived—the hour at which the infantry were to attack—and we increased our range, and began to shoot at a slower rate, searching the line well beyond the enemy's position. There was a short burst of rifle and machine-gun fire on ahead, and the enemy's guns stopped shooting. The train's moment seemed to have come. Our attack must be developing and occupying the enemy's attention ; his guns were probably changing position, and it was a good opportunity to go forward and to have a look at things. I had just pulled the "go ahead" string when the bow howitzer, our mainstay, had a bad jamb. A charge misfired ; the fixed cartridge case came off the shell when the breech was opened, leaving the shell in the bore of the gun ; and it took a long time before we could get a good case off another shell, shove it in behind the shell that had stuck in the bore, and fire it out. Meanwhile a wounded Frenchman or two came walking back round the corner ; they were of the frontal party, and they did not know how the flanking party was faring, but they believed that the attack had failed. "What can you expect them to do ?" one protested with a wave

of his hand at the forest, "in all that pulp"? Everything was silent again now, save an occasional bang from our guns that were still searching the line. I went ahead out of the goose-neck into the straight, intending to sprint down to the burnt bridge and encourage the infantry, and I had not gone a couple of hundred yards down the straight when I came plump upon a twenty-foot break in the line. The enemy must have lifted the rails after our duel with his train in order to prevent a repetition of it. We were effectively held up, and we could only sit there on the edge of the break and send back for the engineers, and wonder what on earth was happening at the end of the straight. While we sat and waited there came an unpleasant surprise. There was a rustling whisper overhead, and then another, and two distant thumps in the forest far behind us. The noise was unmistakable after Lewin; it was a pair of 5.9-inch howitzers firing at their extreme range. It seemed that the dash for Vologda was going to have something to dash through after all. But soon afterwards we saw little knots of blue men beginning to appear on the line ahead, and an orderly came hurrying up the line with news that restored our drooping spirits and sent them sky high. The battle was won. Keeping touch with each other in the dense forest with great skill, the French flanking party had crossed the brook unobserved, and appeared unexpectedly at zero hour on the right flank of the Bolshevik trench. As soon as they saw that their position was turned the men in the trench let off their rifles and a few beltsful from their machine guns, and fled. Our flanking party closed into the line, while the frontal party advanced down it

to join them, and now they were all pursuing the Bolsheviks towards Oborserskaia.

By the breaking of the enemy's front on the Chiana we were released from our stagnation, and our war became for a time a war of movement. Our business now was to press on as quickly as we could, hustling the enemy's retreat in order to prevent him from digging himself in again, and so to force him back to Oborserskaia before he had time to stop. Guard seized the opportunity with the ability of a born guerilla leader, launched his little force at once upon the pursuit, and kept us at it without rest for a week, until we were in the extremity of fatigue and exhaustion from lack of sleep, and had to stop from sheer inability to go on any longer. In the course of the week, as will be seen, we achieved our immediate objective, and took Oborserskaia. We might, I think, have gone straight on, and actually have dashed to Vologda, but for two very good reasons—that there were not enough of us, and that there were too many bridges. The enemy burnt the bridges or blew them up as he retreated, and hard as the Russian railway-men worked under our engineer, Captain Purvis, it took them at least a couple of days to rebuild each bridge. I was constantly finding myself stopped either by that or by the smaller obstacles of rails removed or points that had been blown up ; and the infantry, without the train to support them and to keep touch, could not advance into the air for an indefinite distance ahead of the main guard. It was these obstructions almost as much as the Bolshevik resistance, determined as that was, that spoiled the dash to Vologda, much to the annoyance of its initiators on the

staff, who did not always realize our difficulties quite so clearly as we did who had to solve them. Once when I was sitting in the train contemplating a chasm in the line in front of me that was about twenty feet deep and forty feet wide, I got a message to say that a high power would be glad to know why the train was not advancing. I made a mental draft of an answer about the jumping powers of the heavier species of locomotive as contrasted with those of the kangaroo, but I suppressed it, and returned a more "Service" reply.

The bridge over the Chيامа took two days to rebuild. As soon as I could cross it I followed up the infantry, and found them in touch with the enemy again, and checked by a prepared position across the line behind a bridge which came to be known as the "Iron Bridge," although it was made of wood, like all the rest. We laid our plans for an attack, and one morning at dawn gave the enemy's trench half an hour's fire at long range, in order to prepare the way for the infantry. As soon as the bombardment was over I took the forward unit on in order to see how things were going. The configuration of the field of battle was, as usual, very simple. From a clearing (at point 483) there was a straight reach of line three kilometres long down to a corner at which there was a small white blockhouse. Thence the line curved slightly to the left, and there was a short, straight reach one kilometre long to the enemy's position behind the Iron Bridge. After that there was the slightest possible bend to the left, and then a straight reach six kilometres long to Oborskaia. The white house at the corner was being spasmodically shelled by the enemy's train as we came

up, but there was no other sound of strife. Near the house I found Captain Alliez, who was in command of the French, and I learned that the attack had failed. His flanking parties had lost their way in the forest, and had wandered on without meeting the enemy's position. Guard and Turner came up and told us another piece of bad news. We had been encouraged since beginning our operations at the Chiama by the hope that Force C, the little force that was advancing parallel to us through the forest between the railway and the Dvina, would be able to press on, and by threatening the communications of the force opposed to us on the railway would oblige it to retreat, and so clear our front for us. But news had come that Force C was in great difficulties. It was surrounded, and if it was to be saved it was urgently necessary that we should ourselves push on, and by threatening the communications of the enemy opposed to Force C, clear its front. So far from Force C helping us, we must help it. Guard gave orders for our attack to be renewed on the evening of the next day, after the infantry had had a rest. Meanwhile I was to stay where I was to support them, and to keep the enemy's train back. I could not advance any more for the present. The line had been blown up in several places just ahead of the white block-house, and it would take Purvis a day's work to mend it.

The position of our force was now not very fortunate. Our advance was checked, and our bluff was in danger of being called. If the enemy realized what a small force there was opposed to him, and how unsupported, and if, having realized that, he counter-attacked with his superior numbers, it was unlikely that we could long

maintain our position. Our only safe course was to get on to Oborserskaia as quickly as we could, and by securing a cross-road which led thence to the Dvina and to Onega, on the White Sea, to establish communications with our forces to left and to right, and so to give ourselves something in the nature of a continuous front. Unless we could do that soon, and by doing so could relieve the pressure on Force C, that force might meet with a disaster, and the enemy, having nothing to oppose him between us and the Dvina, would push on there and come in behind us on the line. Having bluffed so high, in short, we must bluff higher still, or lose the game.

Towards evening a crackle of rifle and machine-gun fire burst out at the Iron Bridge. It was only a fit of nerves on the part of the enemy, who must have thought that he saw blue uniforms amongst the trees ; but thinking that it might be an attack developing, I took the train forward round a corner and opened fire on a nest of machine guns. I reckoned without my host. Crack ! came a shrapnel behind us ; crack ! another in front of us ; and then two just overhead. It was as prompt and speedy a bracket as one could wish to see. Obviously we were visible from the Iron Bridge, and an observer was there now in communication with the enemy's train. Several high explosive shells followed, which fell close beside us on the line. It was no place for Miles, and he retired back round the corner again, shooting as he went.

The firing died away, and we fed and settled down to night defence stations for our fourth consecutive night out in the gun trucks. We were living on bully

and biscuit, and we still had enough of them left in the trucks for two days ; but our water had given out. We lit small fires after dark when the smoke was invisible, and we boiled water from the forest pools and drank it tempered with a ration of rum. It was army rum, a sweet and medicated liquor, and I thought with a pang of regret of the naval variety—old, dry, and glittering. The cold iron trucks and the angular ammunition boxes made the most uncomfortable beds, and we remembered our warm and homely living cars that were far behind us with unavailing longing. It might be days before we should see them again. But most of us had not slept at all for three nights, and we were all tired out with serving the guns, keeping the train in working order, and patrolling the line, so that for the few hours that each of us had off watch that night he slept like a log, however hard the truck, regardless of darkling forest, stealthy Bolsheviks, and the occasional alarming crack of a rifle on ahead.

The next day was passed until the evening in a long, slow duel with the enemy's guns, each side firing backwards and forwards along the line wherever he guessed that his adversary might be. Once or twice a series came unpleasantly near us, and at tea-time an 18-pounder shell dropped within a foot or two of the side of No. 2 truck, and destroyed the fire and the tea-kettle of Halwell's crew. But for the most part their shells fell ineffectively in the woods, and so, I expect, did ours. The attack on which so much depended was timed for an hour before sunset. We turned to with all guns for half an hour before it, and then we ceased fire and waited in anxious expectation for the

noise of the battle on ahead round the corner. If the French succeeded we should soon be comfortably established in Oborserskaia ; if they failed we should be on the defensive, and since we had practically no reserves we should then be in a bad position, and Force C would be in a worse.

There was a crack, a sputter, a pause, and then a fusillade of hammering machine guns, loud and furious, that fell and rose and went on and on. We listened, and watched the corner with straining senses. Was the noise getting nearer ? Should we see blue figures retreating down the line towards us, and hear men bursting through the underbrush ? A minute or two would tell. The noise of the machine guns hammered on for five minutes, and then there was a lull in the firing, and thin and clear through the forest there came the voice of trumpets sounding a quick, joyous call. It was the French trumpeters blowing the bayonet charge. To hear that sound in action is the most heart-stirring experience that a man could have. In the thunder of guns at sea I had heard the voice of England, the mistress of the seas ; this was the voice of the great soldier republic whose incomparable armies had given freedom its birth, and were now saving it anew. Once that sound was heard, there was no more doubt as to the outcome of the fight. We knew the French infantry well enough now to know that that trumpet call would raise them and sweep them forward against anything. Then followed a few scattered shots, and then silence.

It was now dusk, and I advanced again round the corner to the gap in the rails. A number of men were coming back down the line, a dark patch moving

amongst darker shadows. Could it be the French in retreat after all? I stood with a hand on the "go astern" lines, ready to hustle them on board and to be off. It was not until they were quite close that I could make out the gray of Russian uniforms surrounded by a thin fringe of French blue; it was a body of Bolshevik prisoners. Apchet was with them, and told us that the enemy had broken before the bayonet charge and was being pursued down the line towards Oborserskaia. The enemy's train was shelling the Iron Bridge from far away. We replied, and succeeded in chasing it off—at least it stopped after we had fired a few rounds. Purvis and his gang came up and started to mend the line in the dark. After some hours' wait the rails were replaced, and we could go ahead; but the Bolsheviks had blown up the line every kilometre or so, and we had to continue the process of waiting, mending, going ahead, and then waiting and mending again, all through the night. It was as dismal a night as anybody ever spent. Thick mists gathered, and there was a steady down-pour of freezing rain. The crew was worn out, and nodded off asleep whenever we stopped. At the first halt some of them crawled under the cars in order to sleep in shelter from the rain; and then when we were ready to go on again it was difficult in the pitch dark to be quite sure that one had prodded them all out, and that somebody was not left underneath them to be killed by the starting wheels. The cars seemed to trap the rain, and every rag that we had was dripping; even the tobacco in my pouch got wet through. It was only the furnace of the engine that kept our bodies and souls together. We took it in turns to get into the driver's

cab in order to dry our clothes, to sit on the warm pipes, and to have a look at the cheerful blaze when the driver opened the door of the furnace in order to throw on more wood. Dawn was at hand when we came to the Iron Bridge. Guard had advised me not to cross it in the dark for fear of traps ; but we were over it almost before I realized that it was there. We stopped on the far side in order to water the engine by means of a hand pump from the stream, and I was standing by the stream with the working party at the pump when, looking about me in the first light of dawn, I saw an object like a white wasps' nest attached underneath the top beams of the bridge. It was a mine of twenty pounds or so of gun cotton that had been left there to blow us up as we crossed. My patrol had not seen it in the dark, but luckily some brushes that I had fixed to the flat to guard against such eventualities had swept the detonators off the rails.

We continued crawling towards Oborserskaia, mending the line as we went. We picked up armfuls of rifles and a Madsen gun that the enemy had thrown away in his flight. By the side of the line there were piles of boxes and brass cartridges that marked the places where his train had been firing. Once while we were halted at a gap in the rails a pale and tattered figure came suddenly out of the forest, and ran up to us with his hands in the air, making a great noise of weeping. It was a Bolshevik straggler who had waited for a favourable chance to surrender, a conscript of the Red Army from Petrograd. He was in great terror, and not without cause, for the Bolsheviks had been savage in their manner of fighting, and our Russians and

the French were bitter against them. But when he was reassured as to the treatment that he would receive he fell silent, and soon afterwards asked for food. They had been half starved, he said ; one tin of bully beef was their daily ration for five men.

A column of smoke rose into the air ahead of us. As we approached it we saw that it came from a bridge half a kilometre on the hither side of Oborserskaia, to which the fugitive enemy had set fire. Beyond and through the smoke we could see at the top of an ascending gradient some wooden buildings and the water tower of the station. The French had already occupied it, and had pressed the enemy back for several kilometres beyond. We halted by the bridge, tired to death, but with a pleasant sense that our task was done and our object gained. In an hour or two the straight of the line behind us became filled with our advancing main guard of trains, and soon there rolled up behind us the gun trucks of the reserve unit, and to our great joy our dear familiar living trucks also. Leaving the smallest possible guard for day defence, we took off our sodden clothes and fell upon our bunks for the sleep which some of us had been without for four days and nights. And when we had been there for half an hour the Bolsheviks began to shell Oborserskaia station, and we had to turn out in pyjamas and other unseemly garments, a haggard crew, in order to get the 3-inch guns into action and to return his fire at long range. All that day we were kept busy shooting, and it was not until the following night that the train could rest.

With the capture of Oborserskaia (September 5th) ended the first phase of the railway war. Our rapid

advance relieved the pressure on C Force, and it succeeded in making its way back to Archangel with the loss of most of its baggage. Our patrols joined hands along the cross-road with those of our forces on the Dvina and at Onega, on the sea, and we were thus fairly well secured against any flank movement by the enemy designed to separate the three forces or to cut the railway in our rear. We settled down at Oborskaia for the second phase of our campaign, a waiting phase which lasted for a month, and was due, I suppose, to the need which the authorities felt for time in which to make up their minds what to do next.

A battalion of a thousand Americans arrived to reinforce the French, and then when a month had been passed in waiting, the authorities made up their minds to renew the dash for Vologda. Why they waited for a month before they did so will for ever be a mystery to us of the railway force; a week would have been more than enough to enable us to take a rest and to make our rearrangements, and the month gave the enemy time in which to prepare fresh positions and to bring up reinforcements of men and guns. A greater mystery still will be why the authorities decided to continue the advance at all. It was plain that the idea of a dash for Vologda was an absurdity. It had taken us five days of hard fighting to force our way for thirty-three kilometres along the line. To get to Vologda at that rate, fighting and rebuilding the burnt bridges, would take us two months, and there were not two months left before the snow would come. There was, moreover, no longer any reasonable hope that we should be joined at Vologda by the Czecho-Slovaks from Siberia,

so that if we did get there we should not be able to stay. To the mind of the ordinary man it seemed as if the reasonable thing to do was to fall back upon Archangel, and to defend it during the winter in some close and readily accessible position ; there was an excellent position for the purpose ready made by nature at Isaka Gorka. It was difficult to understand what purpose, either political or military, could be served by leaving during the coming winter a force on the Dvina and a force on the railway, thrust forward into the wilderness with feebly held lines of communication a hundred miles long, in positions in which they were difficult to feed and almost impossible to support. At any rate, if the railway force was to be left out in the air, Oborserskaia was the best place in which to leave it. The course with least to recommend it was to go on advancing, and that was the course upon which the authorities decided. Russia was to be invaded along the Vologda railway with a thousand men, until winter or the Bolsheviks put a stop to the adventure.

With strategy, however, we at Oborserskaia were not concerned. We were glad to be active again on any conditions, and we set to work with relief to carry out Guard's tactical plans for the prescribed advance. We were out of touch with the enemy, and the first thing to do was to locate his positions ; so the train took up once more its cavalry task of reconnaissance. Our advance post was at a station clearing (point 464) half way up a long straight, nine kilometres ahead. At the far end of the straight there was a blockhouse that was used by the enemy as an observation post and was a favourite target for my guns. The line bent to the

left there, and then after a couple of straight kilometres it curved gently round to the right and ran out on to an open marsh which it crossed on a low embankment a few inches high. On the far side of the marsh it disappeared again into the forest. The marsh, which was called Veliki Boloto, was the biggest open space anywhere on the line—indeed it was the only one. It was oval in shape and about four hundred yards wide where the railway crossed it, and half a mile long. The firs enclosed it in an unbroken circle. Where the line emerged on to it from the trees on our side there was a stream which the line crossed by a bridge made of a pile of sleepers. Guard gave me a force of twenty Cossacks who had just been sent up to us from Archangel, ferocious-looking fellows in long dressing-gowns and high black caps, bristling with knives and scimitars, and creeping forward from our outposts with infinite caution over the unpatrolled and unexamined line the train advanced one day to reconnoitre the marsh. I stopped just out of sight of the bridge, and sent the Cossacks on. They crawled forward through the trees, drew the enemy's fire, and returned with the news that there was a small force at the bridge and that the enemy's main position was in the edge of the forest on the far side of the marsh.

Guard's plan of attack was a development of that which he had adopted in our previous battles, a development made possible by our increased numbers. One party of some three hundred American infantry (party No. 1) was to make a wide detour of twelve miles or so through the forest, and working right round behind the marsh and the enemy's entrenched positions beyond it,

was to cut in on to the line at the next station clearing, at point 454. It was to get to its position abreast of the clearing and a kilometre away from it at sundown, to spend the night there, and to attack next day at the zero hour, which was to be half an hour after dawn. Another party of some two hundred Americans (party No. 2) was to make a smaller detour close round the marsh, and coming in on the flank of the enemy's trenches beyond the marsh, was to attack them at zero hour. A small party, consisting of American machine-gun detachments and a Stokes mortar detachment, supported by fifty French (party No. 3), was at the same time to make a frontal attack down the line by way of a demonstration. The train and the other guns were to prepare for the attack by half an hour's rapid fire before zero hour, and the forward unit was then to push on for its customary purposes of supporting the infantry and helping in the pursuit. It was hoped that party No. 1 might surprise and capture the enemy's trains and guns, and cut off the troops in his front line as they fell back before parties Nos. 2 and 3.

After several postponements the staff, on 27th September, suddenly ordered the attack to be made on the following day. It was too short notice. The several parties had to be collected in haste from scattered posts ; the work took time ; and in the result party No. 1 started on its long and extremely difficult march through the forest too late in the day to enable it to reach its destination before nightfall. During the night I took the train up into position on the short bit of straight line beyond the blockhouse, and before the curve round on to the marsh, and the other guns shunted up into a

scattered line behind me. On this occasion I left behind me No. 2 truck—that with the 8-pounder gun—and took with me instead No. 4 truck, that with the two howitzers. Owing to the comparatively sharp angles in the line at this point both the howitzers in the truck could be brought to bear on the enemy's position.

Dawn broke ; our watches showed “ zero—minus 30,” and all the voices of the guns that had become so familiar in our previous battles burst once more into full cry, a sonorous 4.7 far, far behind, the cracking 3-inch naval guns that I had shed again for the day, and the sharp bark of two 18-pounder field guns. My three howitzers made a fine homogeneous little battery, and their volume of fire was tremendous. Some of my Polish gunners had been recalled, and in their place the howitzers were manned now by a detachment of gunners of the new Russian army that was being enlisted at Archangel. They were mere boys, but they were as good gunners as a week's training, stout hearts, and unfailing cheerfulness and willingness could make them. The officer of the detachment, Lieutenant Russkievich, was a trained gunner and a good officer. I was fortunate that my luck, which had first sent me so good an officer as Beliaieff, should have held in sending me another messmate as zealous and as trustworthy. Russkievich talked German only, besides Russian, and Beliaieff French, so that to direct the proceedings of the train was a polyglot affair.

No sooner had Russkievich's howitzers in No. 4 opened fire from behind the engine than there came a terrific detonation amongst the trees beside my No. 1 car, and the good half of a pine tree came crashing down

on top of us. A second later there was another thunder-clap there, and another tree-top came crashing down. "The Bolshevik is certainly shooting very well," I thought; "he has our position to an inch. I wonder how he got it. We shall have to move. And what queer shells! They seem to be high explosive with a very well-set time fuse." And then Russkievich shouted that it was our own shells that were bursting in the trees. He was firing so much on the beam, and the trees were so near us, that his shells were hitting them before they could rise clear. There was, however, no time to waste, and he had to go on. The two trees that he had shot away must have been the only ones in his line of fire, because there were no more of these alarming prematures. One of our aeroplanes hummed over us and dropped phosphorus bombs on the Bolshevik position. The white smoke of the burning phosphorus rose from the forest ahead in vast columns. The enemy's guns opened fire on us. They swept to and fro along the line, and then settled down to shell the edge of the forest on our side of the marsh. We could hear the steady cracking of his shrapnel as it burst over the bridge round the corner ahead. We finished our half-hour's preparatory fire and waited, all ears for the sound of the three attacks ahead. They ought to begin as soon as we stopped; but save for the noise of the enemy's shrapnel there was dead silence. The minutes passed, and still there was silence. A short burst of machine-gun fire crackled close at hand, and again there was silence. That must have been the frontal attack of the small party which was to advance across the marsh, party No. 3. What had become of the flanking

parties ? The enemy's train was still shelling the bridge, and if party No. 1 had made its attack at zero hour on the station-clearing beyond, the train would have been driven back or captured. Things were not going well.

We waited for half an hour, and since now there was no sound at all even from the enemy's guns I took the forward unit on round the corner in order to find out how things stood. On the way I met a French orderly and a wounded American who were coming back. They told me that party No. 2 had failed to find a way round the marsh, and that they had returned to the line at the bridge. Meanwhile party No. 3 had made their frontal attack across the marsh, and finding that the enemy's position on the other side of it was weakly held, the French had driven out its defenders and had taken possession of it. Party No. 2 had then followed them forward across the marsh and had joined forces with them. Of party No. 1 there was no news. What could have become of it ? One could only suppose that it had gone adrift in the trackless forest ; and that was indeed what had happened. With bad guides, and without time enough for their difficult march, they had been unable to find a way through the swampy forest, and at nightfall they were still far from their destination. In the morning zero hour came and went while they were still trying to find a path ; and when it was so late that all hope of taking part in the battle was over, they had to give it up and to make the best of their way back to Oborserskaia.

All was quiet when I got down to the bridge, but the rails on top of it had been warped by a bursting shell, and I could not get across it. I had hardly had

time to stop the train and to have a look across the marsh before a couple of shells arrived, one on each side of me. The Bolshevik had me under observation from some position in the woods on the other side of the marsh, beyond our newly-advanced line. Since his observers could see me and I could not see him it was no place for me, and I retired back into the forest. As I went he burst a perfectly-aimed shrapnel right over the train. He ceased firing when I disappeared, and about midday, since all had been quiet for an hour or two, I went on to the bridge again to have another look. We stopped a couple of hundred yards short of it, and Halwell and I walked on in order to examine it. For ten minutes we clambered peacefully about it, Halwell on top and I in the stream underneath, and everything seemed quite quiet on the far side of the marsh. I supposed that the Bolsheviks had retreated to their next position, and that our parties were quietly establishing themselves in the trenches which they had just occupied. And then, without a hint of warning, a storm of machine-gun and rifle fire burst from the forest over there, and flights of bullets came rushing in whistling gusts along the line and over the bridge. The enemy was making a counter-attack. I scrambled up out of the stream and Halwell jumped off the bridge, and, full of apprehensions about myself and the train, I bolted back to it with Halwell a bad second. Bullets whistled past us as we ran, and I was annoyed with them for going so much faster than I could, and for overtaking me so easily. We scrambled on board and looked for a chance to shoot. An occasional bullet flopped against the train, and on the other side of the marsh there was a

din of firing and a constant banging of bombs. It was only five hundred yards away, but it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe amongst the trees, and I was getting no reports back from the infantry about their positions. The enemy's guns opened fire on the bridge again. I dropped a shell or two into the forest ahead, at places at which I thought that I could locate the noise of an enemy machine gun, but I decided that in view of my ignorance of the situation it was too risky, and since the enemy's shrapnel was coming close to the train again I withdrew out of sight round the corner and fired down the line at a safer range of a couple of kilometres in order to worry his communications and to make a noise to cheer up our side.

No reports came back from the infantry, but it was easy to understand what was happening. When the enemy realized the small numbers of the force that, in spite of the failure of the flank attacks, had gallantly but rashly pushed ahead against him across the marsh, he hurried a couple of trains up from Yemtsa with eight hundred men or so, including some redoubtable Letts. They spread into the forest and attacked our small advance party on both flanks, enveloping them and driving them back along the line and across the marsh, which, fortunately, was firm enough for men to walk on without sinking. Several detachments, including that of the Stokes mortar, were surrounded and wiped out ; the rest, with many casualties, made their way back to the bridge and to the woods on our side of the marsh, where they rallied and succeeded in preventing the enemy from advancing after them across the open. Gallant work was done by some of the young American

officers and N.C.O.'s in rallying their men and in fighting their way clear after they had been surrounded.

At nightfall the two sides were facing each other again across the marsh, and the guns of each were busy shelling the other's position. Round the corner of the wood the forward unit was at work as a battery at one end and as a casualty clearing station at the other. I had an American hospital orderly on board, so that we were able to give first aid to the wounded within a few hundred yards of our front line, and until a late hour we were busy in tending them as they were carried back round the corner, and in helping the stretcher parties on their way to the rear—the slight cases on foot and those more urgent on a mechanical trolley. So ended the first battle of Veliki Boloto, the worst check that we experienced in the railway war.

There was nothing for it but to correct our mistakes and to try again. It was decided to repeat the general plan of attack, but to compose the flanking parties of mixed companies of French and Americans, so that the French might have the benefit of the greater numbers of the Americans and the Americans of the greater experience of the French. The renewed attack was not to take place until the mixed companies had been through a course of training together, so that they might get used to each other and learn to work together. Meanwhile we held our side of the marsh, and the train had to remain "at sea" in order to support our line.

During this time there were several changes. For the force the most important was that Guard was temporarily invalided home. There could have been no

more serious loss. During the operations that followed the lack of his firm hand on the tiller made itself felt at every hour of the day. For the train the most important change was that the rest of my Poles were withdrawn and that I got instead a detachment of twenty men of the Canadian Field Artillery, under Lieutenant Evans, D.C.M., who had just arrived from the Western front. The addition was of much benefit to the efficiency of the train. The Canadians, in the first place, were properly-trained gunners; in the second, they were woodsmen and settlers who took to the life in the forest like ducks to water; in the third, they were old soldiers experienced in all the arts and craft of warfare. The whole initiative had no longer to come from the officers of the train. As soon as we came to a halt anywhere the Canadians were at work like beavers, making fires and constructing timber defences and quarters for accommodation. Evans too was a master of field gunnery, and he was the right man to be in charge of his efficient but at times almost too enterprising and lively detachment. The gentleness of his address was no complete guide to the qualities of his character. As to those, it is enough to say that he had been sergeant-major of a Canadian brigade at nineteen.

Autumn was now upon us, the miserable long autumn of wet and cold that precedes in North Russia the arctic winter. Our days of waiting were passed in incessant white mists and rain. All day long, after we had taken up our position, there was nothing to do but to walk up and down between the rails, contemplating the blank and dripping iron of the train, and the dark and sodden foliage of the forest that stretched before us and behind

in unbroken walls. A good fire would have been a great comfort, but that we could not have because of the smoke. A warm and a dry-off at the furnace of the engine were our chief luxuries, and our only pastime when we were not shooting and being shot at was long discussions, chiefly sustained by the wonderful Russian appetite for discussion, that ranged in English, bad French, and worse German over all subjects in heaven and earth from sociology to ornithology. I think that sometimes we must have discussed for eighteen hours at a stretch. I know that firing a series with the guns hardly rippled the surface of the stream of talk, which flowed on unchecked in the intervals between using the ruler, giving an order, and stopping our ears against the smack of the gun.

When the mixed companies were ready we received our final instructions for the second attempt. The plan of campaign for the two flanking parties was to be the same as before. A native guide had been found who had undertaken to show to party No. 1 an easier way through the forest, and so to overcome the difficulty that had spoiled the first attempt. But there was to be no frontal attack by party No. 3. Instead of that, I was given leave to create a diversion in favour of the flanking parties at zero hour by taking the forward unit out across the marsh and engaging the enemy's position at close quarters with gun and Lewis gun fire. The train, in fact, which had already figured as cavalry and artillery, was now to figure as a tank.

For this sort of attack there were some special preparations to be made. Since I was going to attack at close quarters and without any infantry escort, we

must take what precautions we could against a rush. The most necessary precaution was to protect all means of access to the cars, such as the iron rungs by which we climbed in and out of them, the buffers, and the flats in front, with entanglements of barbed wire. It had moreover been found difficult to develop machine-gun fire straight ahead from the cars whilst keeping the bow gun in action, and to remedy that we built a neat pill-box of sand-bags and sleepers at the forward end of the first flat. It had a sand embrasure, a little wooden slit looking forward along the line, and there was room inside it for a Lewis gunner and his mate to lie down and to fire out. To get the best value out of the Canadians an important change was also made in the marshalling of the forward unit. Field gunnery was their special line, so we took over a British field gun mounted in the bows of an iron truck, and thenceforward I used that, with a Canadian crew under Evans, as the first car in the forward unit, behind the flats. My old No. 1 car, with the little howitzer in the bow, came next, then the engine, and last No. 2 car with the 8-pounder Vickers gun. The field gun in Evans's hands made a very powerful addition to the fighting force of the train. Even in his cramped quarters he could fire ten rounds a minute, and the gun had a much longer range and much greater accuracy of fire than the little howitzers. It could also fire shrapnel in a trustworthy manner, which the howitzers could not.

Our preparations were completed, and the date of the second attack was fixed for November 10th. The night before we took up our positions as usual for the preparatory fire. I left Evans and the 18-pounder

truck down at the first corner before the marsh, and spaced out the rest of the guns of the train at intervals behind him. In warfare one approaches a second attempt upon a position after a failure with feelings very different from those with which one approached the first. The first time one finds it easy to assume that one will succeed ; but the second time, try as hard as one can to wipe out the memory of the failure, the part of one's mind that is not amenable to the efforts of will and of reason refuses to be anything but dully convinced that one will fail. Spontaneity and momentum have gone from the proceedings, and there is a dead weight of depression to be lifted. There were now plenty of subjects also for anxious thought in our own special programme. The enemy's guns were ranged accurately on the bridge, and we must expect a bad time from them while crossing it and while we were under observation on the open ground beyond. If the flank attacks failed or were delayed the whole attention of the enemy's front line would be concentrated on us at a few hundred yards' range. They might be expected to rush the train or to get round behind it. I wondered how the train would acquit itself in hand-to-hand fighting. What should we do, for instance, if they got underneath the cars and fired up through the bottom ? There were many awkward possibilities. We must jig up and down on the causeway, never stopping still, and try to frighten them away by our gunfire at very short range. At a hundred yards the 18-pounder would be rather formidable. But if the enemy's rifle-fire was severe its crew would not be able to stay at the gun ; it was too exposed there, and they would have to

take refuge in the protected stern of their car. In early days, before I had found out about my crew, I should have been sorry to take the risks involved. But I knew now that under Beliaieff's* cool eye the Russians were steady in action; and the Canadians, too, in the leading car would be a tower of strength.

The day came slowly with a dull and broken light. Thick white mists hung upon the line, and wreathed themselves through the forest. The preparatory fire was opened. The enemy's guns replied with rapid fire on to the bridge ahead and on to the corner of the woods where Evans was with the 18-pounder truck. I feared that he was having a bad time, and since I could not see him through the mist, to anxieties about what was going to happen when we attacked was added great anxiety for his safety. The guns behind ceased fire; our time had come, and I went ahead, and in a moment butted into Evans in the mist. He had had a hot time but no hits. We coupled up at express speed, swung round the corner, and steamed quickly down to the bridge. The mist was so thick that we could not see the trees on the other side of the marsh until we got to the bridge. This was where we should have met the enemy's barrage, but we were unmolested. When we had crossed the bridge I could see at last the dark line of trees four hundred yards in front. The enemy's trench was at the foot of them.

I reduced speed to a crawl, and opened fire with all guns. There was a crash that continued in an ear-shattering clamour, and belching fire in a continuous stream Miles rolled slowly along the embankment. In

* He was specially promoted for services in these operations.

our bows Evans's 18-pounder leaped and cracked like a machine gun ; the range was so short that the crash of the lyddite shell as it burst followed close on the crack of the gun. The howitzers behind were playing on the trench on the right, the Lewis gunners were sweeping the edges of the wood. There was a row of telegraph poles by the side of the line, and at one report of the 18-pounder I saw three or four of them snap and topple over like nine-pins. By the side of the line lay the bodies of men killed in the last fight. I caught sight of a barricade on the line ahead, level with the enemy's trench. Evans was bursting his shells right and left of it, where the Bolshevik machine guns were, making with his one gun a perfect storm of lyddite. As yet our fire, as far as I could make out, was unanswered, but in the noise and excitement I could not trust my eyes or ears for any very trustworthy observations. Looking over the side I seemed to see the hummocks of the marsh alive with faces and lines of charging figures that came leaping forward out of the wood in front. But faces were there that were not imaginary—three white, bearded faces that looked up at us from a hole as we passed slowly by, an outpost, not worth stopping for. The enemy seemed to be a long time in beginning. When was the rush coming? We had rolled to within a hundred yards of his trench, still crashing and hammering, when we heard at last a feeble spurt of rifle-fire, and immediately afterwards we saw dimly, at the far ends of the trench, a few scattered parties running away at full speed into the woods. We reached the barricade still hammering, stopped, and went astern. Our ten minutes were

almost over. When my whistle could make itself heard above the clamour of the Lewis guns the train ceased fire and we waited, all eyes on the trench, in a silence that was tangible after the deafening noise.

Since the silence remained unbroken we advanced again to the barricade, but there was no movement from the enemy's trench. We could see it clearly now, well prepared with mud banks, screens of boughs, refuges, and pits, all much scattered and pounded by our fire. Rifles and equipments were lying thrown about in it, and in positions near the line there were several abandoned machine guns. But there was no sign of life ; whatever had been there had gone. I think that in fact the trench had been held by a small force only, strengthened by the nest of machine guns near the line, and that when Miles had made his sudden appearance out of the mist, making such a ferocious noise, the holding party, machine gunners and all, had made a bolt for it. It must need much resolution to stand up against a charging field gun handled as Evans and his crew had handled ours.

Beyond the barricade the rails were crumpled and torn by shell-fire. I sent a party back to the bridge in order to report our news, and to send for Purvis and his engineers. On their way the party examined the hole from which the Bolshevik outpost had looked up at us as we passed. They found a rough listening apparatus made of a wire and two biscuit tins, which was connected with the bridge, but the men of the post had made good their escape amongst the moss-hags. While Purvis was being sent for we waited by the

barricade for whatever might turn up. Would it be the Americans? or would it be a Bolshevik counter-attack, as it had been in the former battle? It was a hopeful sign that the enemy's guns were still silent. It seemed as if his train must have retired, perhaps because party No. 1 had succeeded in its attack. After half an hour spent on tenterhooks a brown party swung into sight, tramping back towards us down the line; it turned out to be some of the Americans of party No. 2, who had made the circuit of the marsh in safety, and had reached the line ahead almost unopposed. There was no news yet of party No. 1.

Purvis came up and mended the line, and we went ahead, firing red fireworks as we went, to warn any of our people that might have reached the line ahead that we were friends. In a few minutes we arrived at the station clearing (point 454), and there, grouped round the log cabin, were the French officers of party No. 1. A machine gun was in action at the head of the clearing against a party of Bolsheviks who were retreating down the line in the distance.

Party No. 2 had succeeded in their difficult march through the forest, and had arrived at their proper position at nightfall. At zero hour they made their attack. There was some sharp fighting for the clearing, and for a time the enemy's train was under the fire of the Americans' machine guns; but our sappers did not manage to get the line cut in time, and the train and its guns made good their escape. The enemy was now in full retreat, and the Second Battle of Veliki Boloto was won; but the fruits of the victory had still to be harvested by a prompt pursuit. We were now

out of touch with our headquarters, and for our proceedings during the pursuit we must depend upon local initiative. After some discussion the French agreed that an immediate advance should be made by half a company of French infantry supported by the train. The French filed off from the head of the clearing, and the train followed slowly after them.

The next three days and nights were a confused time of constant alarms, shooting, advancing, stopping, mending the line, and advancing again; and at the end of them there was a long and hard day's fighting, and then the final halt. No orders came through from the rear; the infantry, with the train in company, pushed ahead as fast as the engineers could mend the line for us, hustling the enemy back before they could dig themselves in, and taking chances of being ambushed or cut off that would hardly have been justified had we not learnt by now to rely upon the Bolshevik's lack of stomach for aggressive adventures. Several times we saw their parties making defences at the end of a straight, and Evans drove them on again with a few well-placed rounds of shrapnel. Several times we saw across the trees the white steam of his advancing train, and we checked and drove it back with our fire. At night the infantry dug themselves in across the line wherever they happened to be, and the train, in order to furnish a central strong point for their position, spent the dark hours sitting up in the trench and peering forward into the dark. After a day and a night of this work we got to a bend before the next station clearing (point 444). The line ahead had been badly broken, and we had to wait there all day, fighting a duel with the enemy's

train, which was in the clearing round the corner ahead. An observation officer * went on round the corner with a telephone, and with his help we were able on two occasions to drive the train off with direct hits. There was some confused fighting going on at the time backwards and forwards along the line, and on one occasion he had the nervous experience of sitting on the top of a telegraph pole in the dusk while some Bolshevik scouts ran past him below without seeing him.

The main body of Americans came up, and next day they started a battle for the clearing, which was strongly entrenched and held. There followed a long day of fighting, during which the Americans had many casualties, and made slow progress. Towards the end of it the line was repaired, and the train could advance. Coming round the corner in the twilight, we had a glimpse of the dark square of the enemy's train, visible for a second between wreaths of smoke that were rising from buildings burning in the station. Evans † at the 18-pounder got his shot in first, and pluckily keeping his crew in action at their exposed gun in spite of a sharp rifle-fire, he drove back the train, and so plastered the defences of the clearing with lyddite that the heart went out of the enemy's resistance. Next day the clearing was occupied, and our patrols pushed through it to a corner beyond, and then at last a definite order came through from our headquarters, and it was an order to halt.

* Captain Collison, R.F.A., who received the M.C. for his services on this occasion.

† He received the M.C. for these operations, and his gunlayer, Birkett, the D.C.M.

The forces away on our left had meanwhile been making good progress also. But a turn had been given at home to the political wheel. The American Government, it was said, objected to the invasion of Russia with American troops, and we were to advance no farther. After a week of doubt, occupied by us with casual bombardments to and fro, we had final orders to stay where we were, and to make our positions good for the winter. The clearing ahead (at point 444) was to be held with outposts, that near the marsh (at point 454) was to be our advanced base, and our main base was to be at Oborserskaia. The other guns came up and relieved the train in support of the infantry, and we went back to the advanced base for a rest. The train fell into a state of suspended animation, and presently it became evident that it had died a natural death, and that it would never come to life again as a train. There was no question of any further advance; everybody was busy building block-houses and making wire entanglements. Our war had changed from attack to defence, and in a purely defensive and stationary war there was no use for an armoured train as an organized offensive unit. All that was needed was detached guns on trucks.

Meanwhile the news of the armistice had arrived, and had been scarcely noticed by us in the preoccupations of the last days of fighting. But in the inactivity that followed one had time to realize that the incredible event had come to pass, and that the Germans were beaten. The vast obstruction which for so long had filled the whole prospect and shut out every other intention and desire, had suddenly melted away, and the

future had become visible again, but a future that was strange and unfamiliar. The news was at first curiously disconcerting ; one felt that one had been shot suddenly forward into an age that belonged to posterity, and in which one had no business and no place. Amongst the men the news gave rise to a spirit of discontent. How could it have been otherwise ? Who could wonder if men cursed the ill luck that brought them after four years of war to the only corner of the world, and a remote and inclement corner, in which there was to be no peace ?

The wet, misty autumn passed quickly into hard, sparkling winter. Snow covered the ground, growing deeper day by day; and the sombre firs were decorated on every bough with frost work of sparkling jewellery that twinkled with diamond lights in the level rays of the sun. Daylight shortened to a few hours at midday, and the long dark hours were relieved only by the flickering of the northern lights. The cold became intense, and the troops donned Arctic kit. To live in our thin, loosely-built trucks would soon become impossible, and I paid a visit to Archangel in order to procure habitable winter quarters, and to see about the reorganization of the artillery of the force. By means, as usual, of the initiative and energy of Colonel Ewart, our beneficent godfather, the engineers were set to work to make us special trucks with sides, floors, and roofs doubly cased and lined with hemp, sawdust, and other non-conducting materials, in order to keep in the warmth. When in process of time the lined trucks had been sent up to us and the crews had been established for the winter in such comfort as the circumstances allowed, and when

the course of events had made it clear that the train's war was over, my war was over too, and in December I came home.

EPILOGUE.

Creeping in a little tramp steamer round the North Cape and down through the darkling fiords, I thought of that other journey that I had taken more than four years before, up the eastern coast of the Adriatic, with Edward, who had fallen on the Somme. The sun had shone all day then on the golden hill-sides and the groves of silvery olive, and the sea had been blue and sparkling. Now the frosty starlight showed a sea as black as ink, and on either hand, just visible as shadows in the night, there towered over the little ship the iron precipices and the dark, frozen mountains of Norway. Shadows amongst the mountains that were deeper even than the natural shades of night hinted at gorges that penetrated into a greater gloom beyond.

THE END.

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